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THE STORY OF WALT WHITMAN

BY CAMERON ROGERS

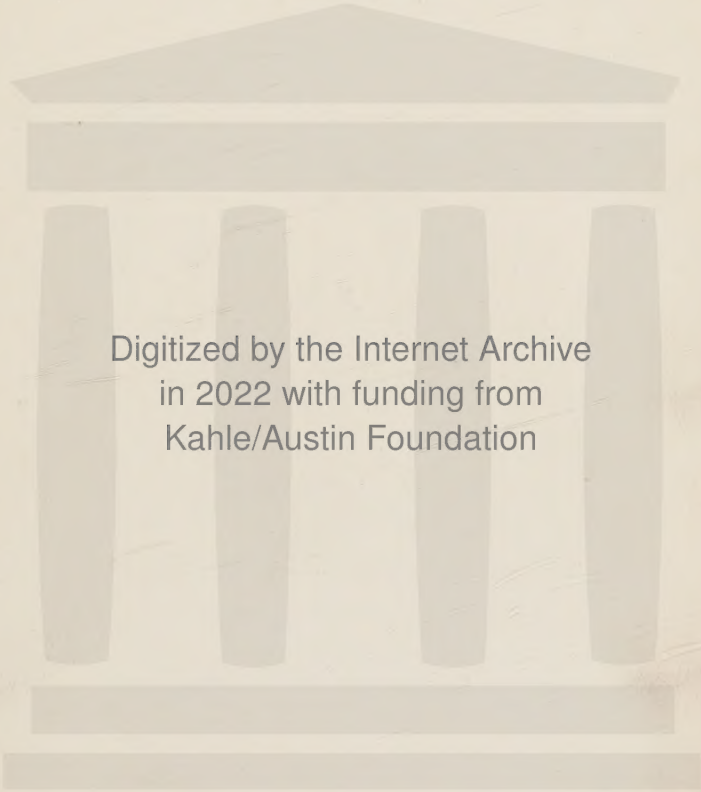
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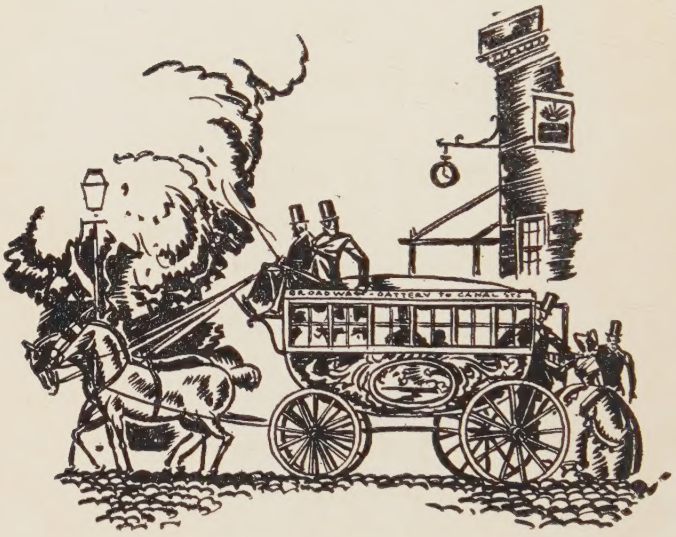
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THE MAGNIFICENT IDLER

BY

CAMERON ROGERS

THE STORY OF WALT WHITMAN

DECORATIONS BY
EDW. A. WILSON



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For Fan

Lucevan gli occhi suoi piu che la stella.

Acknowledgment

To my friend Dan Longwell, of New York, whose mind, like a rich granary, preserves and is constant in its distribution of the nourishment of others, I am in debt for the suggestion that such a life of Walt be written. I wish also to express my gratitude to Frank Henry and to Lyman Beecher Stowe, both of whom were prodigal in confidence and much heartening encouragement.

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The Magnificent
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CHAPTER I

THE friends of Walter Whitman in the village of Huntington upon Long Island were perhaps inclined to speak of him in 1816 as something of a lucky dog, a sharp fellow and nobody's fool, whose judgment even in the unbalancing fever of love had not failed him. For Walter in that year won for his wife Louisa Van Velsor, daughter of Major Cornelius Van Velsor, an old Dutchman blustering as a March wind, whose life was made profitable and easy by the occupation of horse-breeding upon a fat farm that looked out upon Cold Spring Harbor, three miles or less from the homestead of the Whitmans. If talk they did in this fashion, Walter's friends did him an injustice. At twenty-seven Walter numbered among his many solid attributes not that of canniness. Six feet and over of a reticence that seemed not always

happy, muscled like a bison and endurable as certain timbers, he harboured but little craft and his motives rode upon the surface of his life like ducks upon a pond. Like his wife's family his own had for many generations tilled teeming meadows on Long Island, upland stretches of West Hills, but in this traditional husbandry Walter had for himself perceived no profit nor yet pleasure. He had, long before his auspicious marriage, become a carpenter, and it was to such a house as he was wont to build with his own great corded hands that he brought his bride. There was no doubt that Walter was a lucky young man even though the clinking dower that these friends of his had imagined for him seemed to affect, if indeed it was ever proffered or delivered, his material riches but imperceptibly. The homestead of which Louisa found herself the mistress was but twenty feet square with a high roof-tree and no manner of spaciousness, the house of an artisan, a worker with tools who built for homely usage and honest, uncomfortable benefit. Louisa, when in the June night of her wedding she came with Walter to her home, sighed very gently. Major Van Velsor's seemed a great house compared to this, a rambling manor of infinite possibilities for

hospitality and cheer. At times, even during her courtship, she had felt lonely with Walter. He seemed to preserve so solidly within himself the reactions of his being to those events in life the discussion of which she would have longed to share with him. In the house to which he had brought her home, she saw with a fleet discernment the character of her Walter. Hard, angular, serviceable but unresponsive, it awoke a little fear in her. She hated loneliness.

Louisa had been a maiden not a little desired in the countryside, not only for her possible dower but for the staunch and comely quality of her attractions. In her veins ran the pure Dutch blood of the Van Velsors sharpened by the Welsh strain of the Williamses, the family of her mother, and in the generous comeliness of her face and body the sovereign characteristics of the two strains found an harmonious expression. She was, like many another girl of her circumstance upon Long Island, almost entirely unlettered, but in the eyes of the young bucks of Huntington this was rather in her favour than otherwise since what profited a man a bookish wife if she were not fruitful and a sturdy housewife, and it seemed hardly to be believed that she could be all

three. Louisa needed nothing save her solid beauty and the candid sweetness of her nature to be a belle. She might undoubtedly have netted a bigger catch than Walter among the tall men who drank cider in her father's great clean kitchen in the winter evenings, spinning seasoned tales of Yorktown and campaigns with Washington, or of the more recent war, but in the tough silences and harsh self-reliance of her young carpenter there lay a need to whose pathos she more fully responded. Her father, the Major, saw no eccentricity in her choice. The Whitmans of West Hills had farmed those fecund meadows for upwards of a century and a half and had been to boot men of substance in the community, rugged and thrifty, though without notable significance save as successful farmers. Walter's grandfather had owned five hundred acres whose furrows were turned by slaves, and farmers less fortunate considered him as one who walked familiarly with the great of the land, an agrarian power respected in the Colonies, though his prestige was somewhat hardily attacked more than once by the singular conduct of his good wife. This lady took a genuine and unstinted interest in her husband's fields, his produce and its management.

She held his slaves in no great esteem, oftentimes pointing out to her astonished husband that unless beaten now and again they would loaf their owner out of house and home and eat him into the almshouse. The paid overseers, she averred, were confirmed malingerers and slept habitually at noon from a sense of duty lest they accomplish more than they were paid for. One with the Whitman interests intimately at heart should oversee the work afield, and who better than herself? The farmer having no cogent objections to hand, she went forthwith into his fields and thereafter on horseback she drove the slaves shrewdly, swearing fluently upon occasion and publicly using quantities of tobacco, all this to the benefit of the Whitman garners but something to the damage of his domestic fame.

This Whitman grandam lived to be ninety, swearing and smoking until the end, no doubt.

Her presence, however, in the genealogy of Walter did not disturb Major Van Velsor, who indeed cared little for the influences of heredity if he knew what they were at all, and who saw in his girl's accepted suitor the son of good people whose fortunes, if diminished since the war, were still of a promising

sort as such things went. And Louisa would have married him anyway.

So Walter brought her back to the little house, rigid and unreceptive, in West Hills. Supremely adaptable and above all things else a wife, the girl found nevertheless that there were corners beneath that awkward roof-tree that defied her gentle invasion. As in the character of her husband, there were pockets of alien atmosphere in her home that maintained a sovereign independence from affection, try as she would to make it cosy from hearth to lintel. Walter was away the day long, hewing and hammering upon the austere gables of his construction, pursuing his trade in a silent, dogged manner that barred his wife from discussing it with him. A young wife less understanding than Louisa would have broken her heart against the iron of his reticence, but in it her perception caught something of the stoicism of the little boy whose feelings have been hurt and who in ineffective retaliation upon life will not acknowledge it. With an infinitely loving pressure after a day of bitter loneliness she would draw her husband into childish by-ways of talk, banish little by little the silence that had beset her all day, and

insinuate herself into the unhappy intimacy of his thoughts. Louisa was determined that the solitude of her days should not wither her evenings when her husband was at hand to dispel it, even if he seemed stubbornly inclined to sit staring into the fire, his great shoulders sagging beneath his mysterious and unfathomable depression. She did not, as she might have done, construe this apparently causeless melancholy as an unmerited slight upon herself who had left a more generous hearth for love of him. With a maturity of spirit beyond her years and the station of her life, she sought to heal and indeed was determined to do so.

Theirs had not been a passionate love but rather a calm and mutual desire, the satisfaction of which was untinged with the fugitive beauties of romance. Walter was not a debonair lover, one who courted and caressed his wife or lightened her drab hours with the thousand little tendernesses that may so illumine the life of a woman who is deeply in love. He housed and fed her and strove according to his granitic standards to make her happy, but he withheld himself from her absorbing affection and in so doing left her, even in the flexing circle of his arms, unappeasably alone.

But she did not despair. Lonely she might be during the first long year of adjustment and solitary longing for a satisfaction now no longer physical but spiritual, a hunger till then unknown to Louisa, but after that there would be her baby, for she was with child. When she became conscious of this fact her life seemed miraculously to brighten. Walter heard the tremulously uttered tidings with a deep joy that rising through the innumerable twisted channels of his being, manifested itself in an awkward caress and a rough admonition to care for herself. He went away down the road with his carpenter's tools upon his back, oblivious for an hour or so of those processes of his own existence that contrived his sombre moods, and with a feeling of exultation in his heart, but he had forgotten about it all when he reached the scaffolding upon the house he was building for a farmer upon the Hempstead plains, and he worked that day as usual, silent, tremendously powerful in his concentration.

But Louisa sat all day after the housework had been done, dreaming of a companionship that was never to fail her, a new life of love absolute in its expression. The child, her baby, could not, like

Walter, refuse the wonderful abundance of the love aching to be loosed that she possessed within her. Upon it, boy or girl, she would lavish the passion, grown now maternal, that had lain uneasily dormant beneath the hard touch of her husband's hands and the almost brutal impress of his lips. Louisa was planned for a mother. Dimly she realized that her love for Walter came after all from her awakening to that need of his for someone to be tender to him, bear the hostile onslaught of his silences in order to soothe the pain that lay at the root of them—a bewildered sense of unequality with the demands of the world, a disappointment but half consciously recognized that fed upon itself in a blind and horrible inarticulateness. Harsh and utterly self-sufficient he might appear to others, but to her the pathos of an expression of puzzled forlornness that swept now and again across his face remained the cipher with which to unlock the true significance of his life.

She had with her body and her spirit wrought something of a cure in him, contributed to his finding of a happiness not independent of himself, but in doing so she herself had not escaped suffering. She craved some being whose entire refuge she might be, some

heart and mind whose first void she might fill with her own gentle and lovely precepts and to whom in maturity she might herself turn for the love that she demanded. As she sat alone, scanning, with eyes less troubled now, the white road for the figure of her husband, it was a potent consolation to dream that within her she carried such a being.

As the sun in its declension called out the broad shadows of the trees upon the even green of the fields, Walter Whitman swung through the doorway of his home and, casting upon the kitchen floor an armful of kindling chips garnered from his work, observed that upon his way homeward he had been passed and greeted by none other than Elias Hicks the divine.

Louisa considered this news to be of no import. It was of her news still green in her own mind that she would have had him speak. She looked at him with wide and tender eyes, anticipating she hardly knew what of sympathy and protective caress. Walter, oblivious, set about making himself clean for his supper. The wretched man had, in a sort of prodigy of absent-mindedness, completely forgotten.

"Walter?"

The question in his wife's tone could not be ignored.

He raised his head, dripping, from the tin basin that had a second before held it submerged. Louisa's eyes dwelt upon his with a light that bewildered him. Then he remembered. The crooked lenses of his tortured introspection were suddenly shattered. He was by her in one stride and upon his knees, his damp head in her lap, his long arms about her, all in an instant. Her love poured into his heart until a peace alien in his life filled it. That day marked a double triumph for Louisa.

The child was a boy and was christened Jesse, for the Whitmans held by Biblical names. He proved to be a serious baby and even in his early infancy betrayed, to Louisa's subconscious dismay, the aloof characteristics of Walter. She surrounded him with a perpetual radiance of love, but she realized that not yet had she borne the child that was to prove her great abiding joy. But in the following year she bore another boy, a child of sturdy beauty that seemed to welcome the least evidences of love with a chortling enthusiasm that filled Louisa's days with delight. He was christened Walter but called Walt to distinguish him in family palaver from his sire.

Walt throve with an impetous and generous lustiness that astonished Walter, who observed him now and then with an interest in successful production inherited from generations of Whitman farmers. Under these scrutinies Walt would consider his father blandly, first with a slight curiosity in his large gray eyes but after a while with an expression of baby boredom. He much preferred his mother, whom he would follow about all day, rolling on his sturdy legs like a landlocked mariner, his little head with its clear high colour and darkening hair cocked upward with solemn interest in her slightest task. Occasionally, with a sprightly and confiding eye, he would lay hold of one corner of her apron and roll himself swiftly up in its fresh whiteness, declaiming in quick, liquid syllables something which Louisa alone could understand, and even she was frequently at loss. Walt, however, never thought his mother stupid on such occasions, and Louisa, catching the rippling gleam of the one round eye visible in the folds of her apron, would agree in terms that always satisfied him. As he grew a little older he added to this passionate devotion to his mother a consuming interest in the immediate outdoors of his home. A

venerable oak tree of great presence, whose years numbered almost two hundred, first claimed his serious attention because his grandfather, the ruddy and expansive Major, once remarked within his hearing that it was large enough to furnish roosting place to all the birds in the countryside. Walt set out at once to see if it was doing so. His baby mind visualized squadrons of fluffy sleepers but he was disappointed to find that they had apparently all awakened and gone their ways. A grove of black walnuts secured his allegiance because they stood together in a little crowd and, when the wind blew, begged with graceful gestures for him to join them. Across the road from the doorstep of the house an apple orchard spoke to him subtly in a multitude of ways. The apples when green smiled at him meanly through the leaves, but when they had grown yellow and crimson they laughed and winked and nudged one another, sometimes in their excitement falling at his feet and peeping up at him from the grass in a challenging way that was always their undoing. Walt picked them up gravely and let their companions gaze upon their end, but apples continued to fall none the less.

He was much interested in the sea that murmurously nuzzled the quiet cove beaches of Huntington, and he spent much time meditating upon the things that it appeared to be trying to say to him. Then he would find his mother and ask a great number of questions which like unravelling yarn would lead Louisa into depths of whose secrets she recked nothing. Walt would consider her answers with gravity, and Louisa trembled lest he confound her one day with the real reason for the tides coming in and going out, though she consoled herself with the idea that but few people could know such a thing.

On much-anticipated occasions the Whitmans, with Jesse and Walt carefully scrubbed and brushed, would journey over to Cold Spring to the home of their grandparents, the Van Velsors, on the boundary of Queens County. There the house was perpetually filled with jovial people, friends of the old horse-breeder, who sang old songs, and told brave stories that marched of their own accord in wigs and smallclothes through the mind of the drowsing Walt long after the grandfather and grandmother in her Quakeress cap and autumnal sweetness had seen them home upon the moonlit road.

CHAPTER II

IN 1823, when Walt was four years old, Walter Whitman returned one night and summoned a family conclave about the fire. The little circle was augmented now by a baby daughter, who took no voice in affairs, however, as she slept at Louisa's breast while Jesse and Walt gazed solemnly at her tiny impassive face. Walter Whitman had decided to leave for ever the farmlands of his fathers. Brooklyn, at the western end of Long Island, was fast becoming more than a prosperous village, and to the carpenter there had appeared a vision of stout houses destined to rise from his hands along its bustling streets. Louisa listened to his plans, enriched with an enthusiasm extraordinary in this stoic giant, with no feeling of pleasure. She marvelled at his confidence in what seemed to her a fatal exodus from the security of a familiar country hearth to the alien atmosphere of urban activity. She was frightened. In her unconscious loyalty to the land she visualized the inhabitants of towns as twisted men and women whose

apostasy was punished by the lack in their lives and characters of those basic good things that spring only from the soil: health, honesty, and fertility. She loved the meadow and woodland stretches of her birthplace and her home with a profound feeling of familiar kindredship, and the pictures of civic development that her husband painted for her she repudiated in her heart as unworthy and undesirable. But her word, she knew, was of little weight, for the decisions of her husband were slowly but doggedly pursued. She looked into the fire and hugged her youngest child tighter to her breast.

Walt, when he understood that he was to leave his oak and his walnut grove and his orchard and a multitude of other interests which had come to absorb many of the more important of his waking hours, was at first inclined to refuse all connection with his family. They all, saving only Louisa, seemed to him less desirable or amusing company than his trees. He still hoped to find the oak populated with all the birds in the countryside, and he had not yet arrived at an understanding of the conversation of the placid fringes of the sea. After examining his father closely for a long while he decided to stay

where he was with his mother and possibly his baby sister. He was sincerely shocked when the swift dismantling of the house forced upon his mind the conclusion that, irrespective of his affections, his home was destined to be far removed from them.

Walter Whitman had secured in Brooklyn a little house on Front Street hard upon the sibilant fringes of the East River and the new ferry that plied between Brooklyn and New York. Louisa, who carried with her as though in the folds of her garments an atmosphere of cosy and comfortable security, made of it at once a livable and even cheerful place, but her whole being ached for the seasoned timber and sky-swept frontage of the house in West Hills. Her ears, attuned for so long to the brittle melody of innumerable cow-bells and the busy observations of the birds, to the shouting of the winds that galloped in from the sea and the great company of minor noises about the farm, received the clamour of vehicles and crowds shrinkingly and without pleasure. She seldom went abroad save to fetch home what articles she had need of from the shops near the ferry, and from these she hurried back beneath the elms, down the unpaved street between the old Dutch

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houses of stone or Holland bricks and the somewhat flippant and aggressive frame buildings of Yankee construction, fearful lest in her absence mischief of city source had wrought some naughty discord among her children or her possessions. Home again, she counted both with a sense of gasping relief. Marriage was proving arduous for Louisa, though in her generous creed complaint found no expression. With the same unimaginative thoroughness with which he accomplished his crabbéd single-gabled buildings, Walter begot child after child, and his wife, with scarce two years' surcease between the bearing of them, strove still to care for them all and her husband at the same time. Of the nine she bore between 1818 and 1835, eight survived, and the one she lost she wept for as though with it she had forfeited the guerdon of her motherhood. The tyranny of successive conception wearied but did not daunt her. As for Walter, he thought not twice upon it and considered that in naming the last three of his sons but one, Andrew Jackson, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson Whitman, he had adequately equipped them for life. The more so if their residence should be preserved in Brooklyn, for Brooklyn

seethed with patriotism. But even so Louisa smelt in it a grimy jeopardy.

Herein Walt, somewhat to his own surprise, did not agree with his mother. It was not that his loyalty was at fault or that his affections were of a fickle nature, but his memory, taxed with so many new impressions, lost little by little its hold upon the elder allegiances, the trees and their attendant mysteries, the recurrence of their fruits and verdure with the wheeling seasons, and the resonant interjections of the waves nuzzling the shingle along the harbour shores. Brooklyn, Walt held to be filled with things of great interest, and much profitable intercourse was to be gained by observing the ferries as they played their interminable game of swapping ends upon the river. Walt was rising five and attending with no great feeling of enthusiasm the public school, but his unburdened moments he spent following about the big men who threw the ropes from the decks of the ferryboats to the dock. There was a hard, self-sufficiency about them that he approved, and often one of them, looking down, would perceive the large, bland gray eyes of a stout and ruddy black-haired little boy considering from the region of his kneecap

his whiskers or the operation of his pipe. Certain civilities would then be exchanged. With some solemnity Walt would inquire if the horses, that by their steady round-about progression upon the boats propelled these over the water, seemed well that day. Reassured, he would ask if the big man himself was well; what would happen if he swallowed the smoke that drifted continuously from his mouth and nose, and if it was true that in due time he, Walt, would himself enjoy a profusion of whiskers upon his face. Satisfied by the answers to these enquiries Walt would consider the big man with respect and admiration. Farewells would be wished with dignity and Walt would investigate further phenomena of urban life.

Brooklyn in the year 1824 was honoured by the visit of a very great man indeed, no less a personage, in fact, than the Marquis de La Fayette, a name coupled always in the minds of Americans in that day with that of George Washington. The ferry at the foot of Fulton Street was in an uproar of enthusiasm and excitement. The patriot and friend of liberty was to lay the corner-stone of the public library, and the entire population of Brooklyn was

out to see it laid, leaving tools upon the benches, moneys untended in the change houses, and bread steaming in the ovens. Walt was delighted. With his gray eyes smoking with excitement he stood with a hundred-odd other little boys and girls and watched the deliberate progress of the curiously propelled craft as it approached the dock. There was a brave company aboard, notables from Washington and New York, and a great press of them about the tall, slightly bent figure in the bows.

Walt strained his eyes. He gave a series of little jumps into the air. The boat ground reluctantly into the creaking, yielding timbers of the dock. The crowd on board seemed to fall away behind that embodiment of romance grown mellow and silvery, the French nobleman who at twenty had held from George Washington and the Continental Congress the commission of Major-General in the Revolutionary Army of the United States.

The little procession moved ashore in a silence as awful as a great tumult.

Then the citizens of Brooklyn detonated in a vast unit like a human bomb. They cheered and bellowed and tears ran down their cheeks and sobs tripped and

tumbled in their throats and still they cheered. Walt screamed upon a very high and sustained note that he paused an instant to admire but resumed at once lest the hero's eye should fall upon him and be hurt by his lack of enthusiasm.

La Fayette and the notables stepped into carriages and commenced the ride of state. The coach honoured by the hero was incomparably the finest, Walt saw at once. It was canary-coloured and seemed in itself a personage. The parade moved off in the direction of the ragged excavation that was prefacing the construction of the public library, and Walt and his diminutive contemporaries followed at a gallop. The coaches stopped, but the rear-guard broke like a high wave into the pit. The children plopped out of sight like dab-chicks diving, and several gentlemen, dismounting from their vehicles, plucked them from hazardous positions and placed them in safety within the excavation. The great man himself, with characteristic gentle and courteous kindness, sought to do the same. He looked about him. There, practically at his very feet, struggled a sturdy child that shone like a scrubbed kettle. La Fayette picked it up and, kissing a red cheek, placed it out of harm's

way. He did not know what he had done. A minute later he had forgotten all about it.

But for Walt the whole world had become suddenly a vast arena in the centre of which, alone and the subject of every inspection, stood the Marquis de La Fayette of France and America and the halls of fame, and Walt Whitman of West Hills and Brooklyn. Ecstasy enclosed him in a glittering cocoon. He must share this thing with someone. It was a joy too great to be borne alone. The concourse with its glamorous central figure moved betimes away and Walt bolted for home and Louisa.

Home at this time was no longer on Front Street. Walter Whitman, playing a game perfectly unsuited to his talents, speculated in the results of his labours, mortgaging or reselling the houses which he built. To Louisa's infinite dismay she would no sooner invest one with the atmosphere of home when her husband would bid her see to the packing with a view to moving on to another. From Front they had moved to Cranberry Street and thence to Johnston, where Walter had built a house rather less harsh in appearance than his previous ones and which Walt was inclined to consider pretty. But Louisa took no

satisfaction in it. She feared the worst and sure enough out they moved again, this time to Tillary Street. Louisa's spirit groaned. She passionately desired permanence, for she was once again pregnant.

Upon this great day of annunciation Walt travelled to the house and in to his mother like a small comet. Louisa had been at the ferry, as had her husband, but she had returned to her bread and the acute demands of numberless stockings that gaped incredibly. She was sewing. Her face with its sweet serenity was grown a little sad, and as she turned her head a thread or two of silver shone in the smooth thick beauty of her hair. She was twenty-nine, and the pliant comeliness of her body was undiminished, but in her movements now there was a hint of weariness though in her eyes there lived no discouragement or disappointment. Her eight years of married life had used her not tenderly. She remembered the easy abundance of her father's home with hardly a feeling that with it her own life had once been intimately connected. Ease was so alien to her days that she had ceased even to imagine a time when for an uninterrupted hour or two the cares of the house and the children, the baby at her breast or the baby within

her body, would not utterly absorb her thoughts and her energies. And yet she did not consider herself less fortunate than other women. With an unquestioning faith she believed that in making a home for her husband and in bearing him many children she had pressed life dry of felicity and merit. It was a belief that yielded her much happiness. She clung to it.

Walt arrived at her knees bursting with the great tidings. Panting, he continued to gaze at her, his eyes perfectly round and his mouth moving in little noiseless curves. He could find no adequate beginning for his story. Louisa absorbed his excitement into the fecund placidity of her being.

"Yes, son."

Walt gurgled.

"Walt, what is it?"

Then the news arrived and La Fayette walked with living dignity from Walt's crackling imagination into that of Louisa. She was thrilled, but the thing did not seem strange to her. Nor did it seem to her that chance had had a hand in it. Her son had been selected to receive this honour because from all that multitude of children he had stood out as an extraordinary and beautiful child. She was grateful that

the distinction had not been misplaced. Walt, lest the noble figure of the great Frenchman lose an iota of its vivid outline and detail in his memory, put his hero on board the ferry again, landed him, transported him to the site of the public library and so to the tremendous climax. At this point in the now familiar epic his father entered the kitchen. Walt paused.

"Tell your father about it, Walt."

"Come here, son."

Standing between his father's knees, he spun again his tale. Walter Whitman heard it, his strangely brooding face impassive, his eyes heavy upon his son's vivid animation.

"So he kissed my son. Well, that's fine, Walt. That's a thing a man can remember. Now you run and tell Jesse to fetch in those chips I brought home with me."

Walt retired. He had expected more than these few words but he knew his father. Walter Whitman rarely spent excitement or enthusiasm on the things in life that Walt found so utterly delightful. Still he might have said more. But Walt had really had very little hope. His mother, too, had said little, but there lived that quality in her silences that caused them to

lend sympathy and wisdom to a conversation that might otherwise have appeared one-sided. His father's silences, as Louisa had long ago found out, hurt one like a harsh sword or a blow. They were offensive to a cosy intimacy and seldom failed to destroy it. Walt reflected upon his father. The other day he had grown suddenly angry and had struck Jesse for a fancied impertinence in a discussion of Elias Hicks, the Quaker divine. Before that he had given Walt himself a solid spanking for filling the water pail with lilac blossoms. A stern man. A hard, a violent man, but Walt had seen him on a day when a fever had suddenly fallen upon his mother, holding her in his arms as tenderly as she herself held her babies, rocking her gently and crooning to her an old ballad of love and lovers while the tears ran down his cheeks into Louisa's hair. Walt had also seen him carry in his arms for more than a mile a dog that had hurt its foot and tend and feed it at the end of the journey. So, too, on the whole, an admirable man.

Thus, with a faith restored in his male parent, Walt, forgetting Jesse, betook himself at a run to tell the great adventure of La Fayette to his tall friends, the ferry dock hands.

CHAPTER III

WALT was very mild in his appreciation of the routine of schooldays. For six years he attended, with a regularity that afterward astonished him, a public school from whose curriculum he drew the only methodical instruction that he ever received. He left his home at the summons of the bell despondently, with the conviction that his admirable friends upon and near the ferries would perceive no virtue in this schooling. He saw no virtue in it himself. It smelt of dead and dry things, not those that plunged or waved or beckoned, green and pulsing and fragrant with life. Mathematics he considered little more than a stupid game, and it appalled him that from the schoolroom windows he could see only part of a tree and almost nothing of the sky.

On Sundays, carefully burnished and wrought upon, he went to the Sunday School at St .Ann's. He enjoyed this, for it was interesting to hear of another carpenter who at an early age had made a great stir in the world a long while ago, but not so long ago

that his mother did not preserve his words, and the record of his life, in a large black book with clasps. But as he listened a mention of the Lake of Galilee would point out to his thoughts that the tide in Cold Spring Harbor would be out at that hour, and the gulls inspecting the packed dark sands, and the men in the little boats in the offing would be hauling in fish on handlines, with the salt in their nostrils and the salt wind in their hair.

Then he would wriggle with sustained but stealthy violence and reflect tenderly and pleasantly that this week he was to visit his genial grandfather, the Major, and his Grandmother Van Velsor, in the rambling airy house in Cold Spring.

There he enjoyed himself prodigiously. With a tanned and somewhat ragged friend from Huntington he explored the sands with infinite and unnecessary stealth for the eggs which the gulls with friendly carelessness left reposing quite in the open, apparently naïvely confident that the sun would hatch them before harm overtook them. These eggs, half again as large as hens' eggs and satisfactorily white and shapely, Walt and his companion would suddenly surround and capture with military circumstance, but the gulls

seemed as callous as they were careless. They made noises and planed in beautiful zigzags, shrilly suggesting that the eggs be replaced, but when they were not they seemed to forget the whole matter. On some days the two boys would dig clams and cook and eat them, building a little fire of bleached driftwood that burnt green and pale yellow in the sunlight, throwing in the clams and pulling them out when the porcelain-like shells had opened, and enjoying them ravenously and in dozens. On larger expeditions the Major himself and his wife, who seemed to have been aged in a solution of sweetness and clean simplicity, attended with bewhiskered young men and solidly handsome and cheerful girls, and clam bakes on a great scale would be held, with cider and singing and heavy, healthy jests.

But Walt preferred either his friend's society or his own in his adventuring about Long Island.

The bewhiskered young men seemed one-idea'd, and though the girls reminded him, in moments inexpressibly grateful, of Louisa, they ogled the bewhiskered ones with a determined and unsubtle coquetry that annoyed him. They were not excited at finding gulls' eggs and deprecated the superb

relentlessness of the incoming tide. As for their comeliness, he thought but little of it.

When the winter had flung its white and gray mantle upon Brooklyn, making the unpaved and unlevel and unlighted streets even more to be avoided at night and the Whitman house, now in Henry Street, a place of comfortable warmth and cosiness that centred and radiated about his mother, Walt still made his joyous pilgrimages to Cold Spring and West Hills. On the South Bay inside the outer bars, spouting in the gray sweep of the seas, the water was comparatively shallow and was frozen over with ice, black and hard looking as obsidian, through which Walt and his friend would chop with an axe. As the sea welled in smooth, even circles from the hole so made on to the ice, one of them would with a swift violent gesture thrust an eel-spear into the jagged opening and with a howl of excitement withdraw it with a fat eel writhing like a thick black ribbon upon its tines. Or else the spear would disappear with a tiny splash and reappear barren of anything save swiftly forming icicles. This was always a disappointment, but one gray afternoon, when the sea sobbed as it rose out of the hole in the ice as if it had

been terribly wounded, they found a whole settlement of eels, fat ones with white meat that the Major considered with an eye grown tender and affectionate when they appeared upon his table.

Montauk and its barren pasturages the boys wandered over and listened with distended and tingling ears to the tales the grazers told them of Kidd's treasure and the eerie spread of canvas in the gale-driven winter nights at sea that marked the ghostly sailing of the Flying Dutchman. These grazers were a curious company of men, burned black by sun and wind, ragged, bearded, and with respect for nothing on the earth, below it or above it, save General Washington and John Paul Jones. They came but seldom to the settlements and, save themselves, saw nothing but the eternal splendour of the Atlantic and the Atlantic skies, their herds of sheep or cows, and droves of horses or the disreputable assurance of their savage dogs. The stock they cared for was owned by well-to-do farming gentry in the towns, who knew them to be dependable if half barbaric, and they themselves came but seldom to inspect it. The grazers looked upon Walt as a kindred soul who could not bear to be mewed up in towns or villages

and confided in him accordingly. Eleven and going on twelve, he spoke to these men as equals now and listened to them gravely as they listened to him, with a child-like faith in the statements and observations of each.

It was the sea, particularly, that laid a spell upon Walt. It beset him everywhere, in Brooklyn, at school, at home; it sang to him, cursed him, pleaded with and made love to him, and filled his memory with its moods and its beguilings. Drenched in its restless cleansing brilliance he began to imagine it as a sort of parent to which he could turn as he turned to Louisa, for consolation or praise or repose.

He was twelve and emancipated for ever from the rusty shackles of book-learning at school when he was employed as the boy in a lawyer's office on Fulton Street. His chief was a genial man whose tastes were sound in literature and port wine and who liked Walt instantly for his young clean strength and his candid eyes. He presented him with a desk and, of more importance than that, a ticket to a circulating library. Into this Walt burst like a young mustang, long driven by thirst and hunger, into a corral of new clover. Finding the "Thousand and One Nights"

upon the first shelves to which he came, he observed them with cautious interest. He took out a volume and thumbed it through. He looked about him. No one seemed to be gazing at him askance so he took it home and read it. He read the tales all through and became intoxicated with romance. Before he slept at night an ivory vision of Sheherazade would appear within his mind, Jaaffar the Barmecide, Haroun the Just, Sinbad and the King of the Ebony Isles, a frieze of colour and passion that led his entranced interest into channels whose intricacy and charm fascinated him. In the meantime, he took leave of his lawyer patron and became assistant to a doctor and shortly after that an errand boy. These daytime occupations interested him but little, though when he remembered, he did what he was told. Being an errand boy was not unpleasant, since it permitted much time for meditation and even reading either between errands or upon them, but there was the drawback that he would not seldom find himself back where he started with the package still in his basket. His various employers regarded Walt with affectionate astonishment. He was, they told themselves, congenitally idle but extremely lovable,

and it gave them a certain satisfaction merely to look at him. Walt was growing still with the abundant vigour that had been characteristic of his life since babyhood. Very large for his age, his boy's muscles were pliant and his skin lustrous with perfect health. His hair was a black that glinted like his mother's above the clear red-brown of his face, and his gray eyes with their mild questioning glance and shifting curious lights caused people to look at him and laugh with unwonted cheerfulness when he spoke and the men to punch him gently about the chest and arms for the sheer pleasure of feeling the sound resiliency of his flesh. His mother had come to regard him as the child that in her young wifehood she had looked forward to bearing and rearing to be her own especial pillar of strength and affection. But she did not entirely understand him. He bore about him an air of native prescience that awed her a little. He read things that seemed to her useless and fantastic but that appeared to lend him a dignity that seemed scarce respectful or decent in one so young. Before his father's sudden and violent angers Walt preserved an impersonal tolerance that destroyed something basic in her plan of life. The wrath of the father

should confound and chasten the child, and if it did not, the child might impiously mock the paternal wrath, but for the child to submit quietly and yet with an air of absolute yet gentle imperviousness made Walter Whitman's passions seem puerile and without dignity. The solid structure of Louisa's faith in the domestic hierarchy shook but she made no revision in her creed. Perhaps there was an enigmatic naughtiness in Walt that was yet to be purged away.

She was inclined to lay all this to his heedless habit of reading while working or while eating, while doing everything except sleeping. When, after deciding to relinquish his career as an errand boy, he became an apprentice compositor for the *Long Island Patriot*, Louisa reflected thankfully that he might now combine to some profit his labours and his pleasures, a thing which he had done hitherto with no material effect save that of change of vocation. To some extent, her hopes were realized, for Walt at last had found work which he loved to do. Printing delighted him, and though he continued his galloping progress through literature he applied himself with a feeling of solid achievement to the congenial task of learning

its manufacturing aspect. Mr. S. E. Clements, who owned the *Patriot*, took a proselytizing interest in Walt and even saw to it that he went to church. Success, he pointed out, came with hard work, concentration, frugality, morality, and more hard work. Walt pleasantly agreed that this was so, but nevertheless Mr. Clements was saddened to find that two thirds of Walt's working hours were rigorously devoted to the consumption of the Waverley Novels and talk of a disconnected nature with an aged colleague who had seen Washington and who in his anecdotage told crimson tales of the campaigns in the Mohawk Valley and the fearful iniquities of the English and the Indians.

Walt moved on. As he now possessed a definite talent he marketed it successfully to the *Long Island Star* and resumed his apprenticeship in the composing room of that journal, following nevertheless his accustomed routine of reading and pleasant meditation with a dash now and then of hard work. To his joy he had found that he could express himself not only in prose but in verse, and he substituted his ability and passion to compose for the narratives of the senescent veteran of the *Patriot*. The narratives of the

veteran were soon forgotten as a source of amusement, but as material for his little tragedies, each heavily ribbed with a moral, Walt retained them in their every detail. These little works of sentiment he tended and cherished with great affection, and when they appeared in the columns of the *Star*, as one or two did, he regarded them with admiration and respect. He was dimly aware that they lacked a certain thoroughbred air. They recalled now the purple fantastics of Beckford grown something pale, and now Sir Walter Scott dissolved in tears and moaning faintly beneath a weeping willow. They seemed somehow of hybrid source and paternity, but when he read them in print he frankly admitted to himself that they were wonderfully done. Louisa considered them in a like wise, but a deep, unerring quality within her of which she had no conscious knowledge, a pure gift of perceptive criticism, bade her, when Walt read them to her, reserve something of her admiration. Louisa was a skilled and experienced cook and her bread and her biscuits were perfectly leavened masterpieces. She sensed a certain sogginess in Walt's performance in his different field, and in a homely flash of imagination she visual-

ized his little writings as muffins whose destiny had missed accomplishment, whose unwholesome heaviness became neither their size nor their significance as nourishment.

But she did not say so. She spared her criticism, not because she disliked to hurt her son's feelings, for Walt received abuse as well as praise with the same serene indifference, but because in her wise humility she recognized that such things were alien to her understanding, cooked or uncooked.

She listened to them but she privately found them hard to digest.

Mr. Alden Spooner, the proprietor of the *Long Island Star*, like Mr. Clements of the *Patriot*, possessed a definite admiration for industry, and indeed, he demanded it in his employees. It seemed to him that Walt as a compositor composed far less of the journal than for it. He began to observe Walt with some thoroughness and was outraged to find that consistent and productive labour was a stranger to him. Reflecting upon this, it seemed to him that a beating performed in a magisterial but not unkindly spirit might create a more worthy point of view in the boy's mind. It would perhaps save this young Whit-

man from taking the wrong turning in life. A good idea. But there existed one insurmountable difficulty. Walt at sixteen had attained a stature and a breadth that were tremendous. Mr. Spooner himself was a small thing beside him, and even Walter Whitman beheld in his second son a giant above whom he now failed to tower in the least. Who was the colossus to be who would undertake to accomplish Mr. Spooner's planned reform? Wistfully Mr. Spooner put the thought aside. He was beginning to believe that in Walt's idleness there was something elemental. As well command the wind to cease its boisterous holloing or the trees to cease their flowering as to order Walt to desist from his deliberate and lazy strollings or his hours of contented meditation and reading. Mr. Spooner was right. There existed no routine which Walt's indomitable determination not to work, save when the spirit moved him, could not shatter. With perfect urbanity he parted from Mr. Spooner and the *Long Island Star* and sought occupation in New York.

New York in its interests and its opportunities for absorbing impressions and experiences dwarfed Brooklyn as Brooklyn had dwarfed West Hills. It

was, correspondingly, a far harder place to work. Employed in a printer's office and obliged to be at his case at a certain hour and to remain at it until a certain hour, Walt sat upon his stool and thought gloomily of driving an omnibus for a living. It was, after all, a wider life and it kept one in the open air among the crowds. Composing type began to bore him intolerably. He was consumed with a fever to learn, and in the long bare room with its darkened dusty panes and the cases filled with their little gleaming cargoes, what was there to learn that he had not already conned over to a surfeit? His work done for the day, he would burst out upon the streets like a flood of mountain water released from a dam. Then he would walk upon Broadway, filling his lungs and his eyes and expanding like a sail that has trapped the wind at last. One day, passing the high stoop of a house of solid burgher-like substance, he saw a fur-swathed old gentleman being helped into a sleigh painted and belled like an expensive toy. Walt was interested at once. The old gentleman was tucked in carefully, his mittens pulled securely on, and the two men in the driving seat cautioned and admonished to look to their gear. The little groups of retainers

stood back, the old gentleman piped a farewell, and the equipage disappeared in a fine stinging shower of snow and the melodious discourse of the bells. All this ceremony and care intrigued Walt. Who was the little old man who looked like an elongated furry ball in all his coats? He turned to another onlooker who had marked the departure of the sleigh with eyes round and popping with admiration and asked for information. "That," replied the admiring one with hoarse impressiveness, "that was Mr. John Jacob Astor, worth thirty millions of silver dollars, and not a bad old Dutchman neither." He turned his still popping eyes upon Walt. "Thirty million nice—round—silver—dollars! Gurramighty!" And he continued down Broadway, his arms flapping with the excitement that the delicious fullness of his phrase seemed to induce.

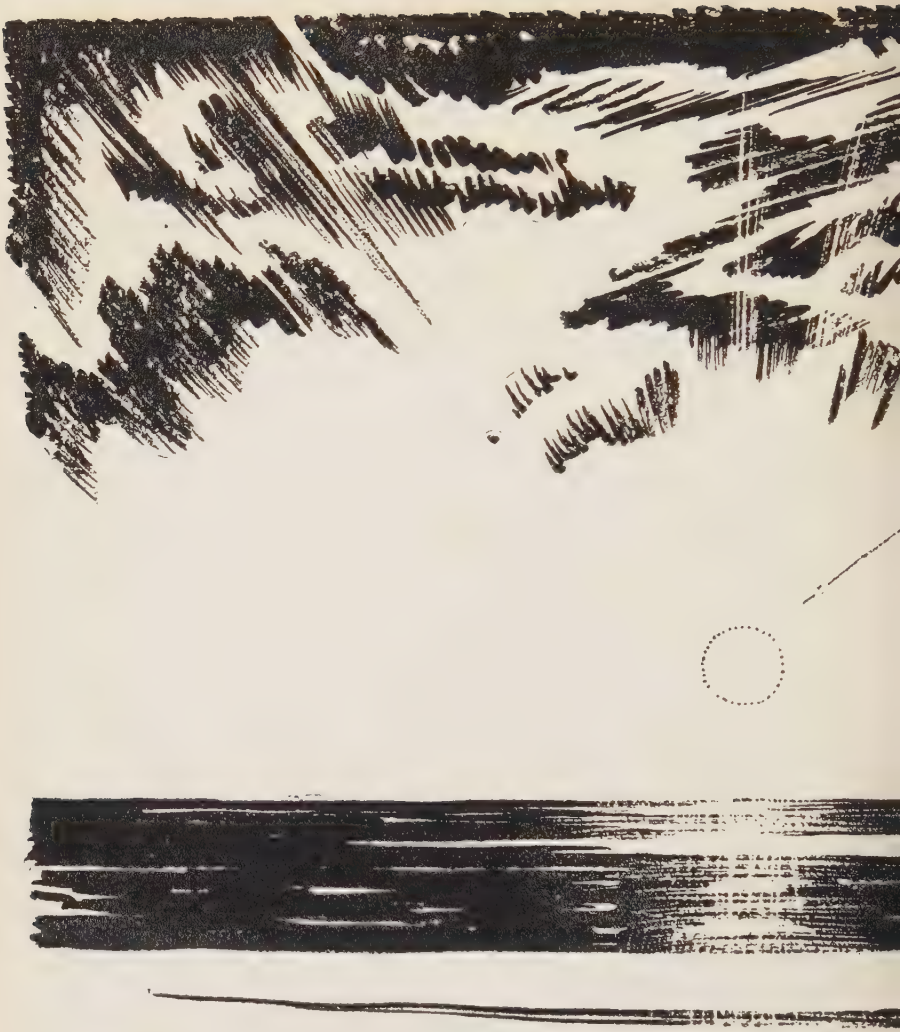
Walt proceeded on his way. The astounding number of the round silver dollars left him unimpressed. Such wealth seemed worse to him than the necessity of working all day and every day, but the things that this wealth could buy delighted him. The furs, the sleigh, the clean-limbed, steel-haunched horses. Nice, very nice, but then, after all, not necessary. He

became extremely buoyant and then abysmally depressed. The snow and the clean crystalline air reminded him that in West Hills there were no house-flanked streets to check the level run and sweep of white. He was tired of New York. Rising on his toes he drew into his big chest the little scurrying wind that seemed to come, familiar and persuasive, from Long Island.

CHAPTER IV

"WALT WHITMAN, you can just put on your coat like a civilized human being if you're going to eat at my table."

The voice was shrill and a little querulous, but it lacked the stiff backbone of honest anger. Walt groaned inwardly, but he pretended not to hear and continued to gaze out the window. He was sore of spirit. Mrs. Brenton, the wife of James J. Brenton, his part-time employer upon the *Long Island Democrat* and his landlord, persecuted him tirelessly with tedious sermons on the fate of the idle apprentice and the disposition made in the Hereafter of the uncleanly. He considered her an empty woman of noise and loud affliction but he could never escape her. She was coming into the dining room, headed, he had no doubt, for the china closet. Walt, occupying his favourite seat near that compartment, drew his black head between his great shoulders and steadfastly stared at his toes. He heard her pause at the door.





"Well, of all big lazy things!" She swept toward the closet.

"And how many times have I got to ask you to remove your feet when you know I can't get by?" The feet were removed.

"Why Jim keeps you, sometimes I can't think. And him working so hard. . . ." With an exasperated mooing sound Walt surged out of his chair and rolled hugely through the door. This woman complicated his life, try as he would to ignore her. He began to regret having come to the village of Jamaica. The three years that had passed since he had quietly disappeared from his stool in the printing office in New York had been variously and pleasantly spent, but it began to occur to him that to return to school teaching was proving a mistake. He had, at seventeen, quitted his composing case for the master's desk in a small school in Babylon and he had enjoyed his position of pleasant authority because, a child himself, he greatly liked children and the hours were unrigorous and his own. He had taught for a while at Flushing and then at Woodbury and at Whitestone, and in every village he had been loved and pondered upon and never quite understood and inevitably

missed when he suddenly strolled away to observe another vista of fields and mature, sweet-smelling orchards.

His method of teaching had been not unlike his own personality, now as strongly individual among the young men with whom he occasionally went abroad as a tree autumnal and flaming among its fellows still normally and solidly green. He possessed absolute authority but he remained perfectly genial. To illustrate his simple problems he would tell a story, and to the incredulous delight of his scholars the problem would be absorbed without a ripple by the illustration. The story would include, as far as they could see, the entire gamut of human emotions. Walt, the younger children considered as great a man as President Jackson and almost as great as Washington. He was much stronger even than the biggest boys, some of the same age as himself, and as bright as anything, probably as bright as Mr. Marshall.

When he dismissed the class Walt would with some dignity remain seated, but as soon as the last of the impatient shuffling feet had vanished through the door he would dive from his chair and appear upon the playground with such speed that, like Sleipner,

the Steed of Odin, the action of his big legs seemed blurred and multiplex. There he would play pom-pom-pull-away and an exciting game consisting of each player having a little hollow at the foot of the fence, into one of which a ball was rolled while everyone fled save the owner of the lucky hollow. He would lay hands on the ball and attempt to hit one of his fleeing companions, and whoever was hit had to put his head against the fence and, leaning over, expose his behind to the enthusiastic marksmanship of the rest. As Walt was the easiest object to hit in the neighbourhood save the sides of the schoolhouse his head was often against the fence. But once more in the schoolroom he was the master, and the students cut short their laughter and tumbling tumult at the threshold.

One day a small boy, speechless with excitement, arrived, holding in his arms like an interesting woolly baby, a woodchuck captured while in an absent-minded revery on a stone wall. Walt became as excited as the small boy and took the woodchuck tenderly and placed it, bedded down with grass, in the wooden box that served as the classroom waste-paper basket. The woodchuck, slightly bewildered

or perhaps uncertain as to its road home, remained there stoically calm, observing now Walt and now the class with a bright but unforgiving eye. Later Walt saw it to its door, guided by the small boy who wished nevertheless to retain some proprietory interest, but Walt pointed out that this might not be since the woodchuck itself thought nothing of it.

The girls in Walt's classes vied with determination with the boys for his favour, but they were astonished to observe that if there seemed to be any favour shown, it descended not upon them. Then they all fell in love with him for a week and hated him for two weeks because with amiable dullness he failed to mark their pretty devotion. They decided in indignant caucus to treat him with a distant coldness. They did so. Walt failed to note, apparently, any change in their deportment, so they were compelled to consider him a large and handsome being of the neuter gender utterly without philandering possibilities.

When there was no teaching to be done Walt wandered the length and breadth of Long Island, talking with fishermen and farmers and on Montauk with his old friends the grazers, who listened to him with affection and a certain ironic humour. He would

in their silent, sharp-eyed fellowship talk of wonders that they had never seen and devoutly never wished to see, and now and again as he spoke, one of them would interject a swift remark that would evoke a sharp howl of laughter suddenly stilled, and his hearers would continue to stare at him with eyes no less bright and wild than those of their dogs.

His neat black schoolmaster's coat fascinated them and they picked bits of lint or leaves from its solemn texture with infinite care. Walt always left them with regret.

West Hills had lost none of its hold upon him and now Walter Whitman and Louisa and the younger children had returned to the old farm, leaving Brooklyn, where Walter's fortunes had failed to prosper and where Louisa's health had broken dangerously beneath the burden of constant childbearing and added domestic cares. Louisa, in her heart, thanked God for her illness. With plodding folly her husband had mortgaged and inevitably lost nearly all the houses that he had built, but to Louisa these misfortunes had been due not to her husband's astonishing ideas of business but to the evil men of town birth and upbringing who had cheated and

thieved from him. Her confidence in Walter was never abated though it was she who suffered, packing and unpacking, cleaning and cooking and bringing more little Whitmans into the world than were ready to come, for Edward, the last son born, arrived, poor baby, unequipped mentally or physically.

Back in the West Hills farm she was confident that life would begin anew for all of them, and in her heart she hoped that Walt would relinquish his distressing nomadic existence and return to the ancestral hearth, but her strange boy would have none of it. He came to see her often and sat with her, holding her hand, now, alas, no longer plump and grown slightly tremulous, talking of his writing of which he continued to do much and assuring her that where he boarded the food was plentiful and the atmosphere godly. Walt himself set no store by the latter. He was, in fact, excessively irreligious as far as church-going went, but he respected Louisa's deep, utterly unquestioning faith. But after a little time he would kiss her, halloo a cheery good-bye to his father, and swing away down the white road, extraordinarily handsome, Louisa thought, extraordinarily handsome, but like Tabitha, her aloof and beautiful cat, extraordinarily

hard to keep at hand, the recipient of caresses and minute, comfortable attentions. Walt, returning to the house in Flushing where he boarded, would reflect upon his mother with the same affectionate satisfaction as overwhelmed him when he thought of the sea, and coming to dinner he would continue to reflect upon her in a sort of ecstatic meditation while his landlady's four comely daughters flung their little nets of conversation vainly in his direction.

These four girls were convinced that one of them was to become Mrs. Walt Whitman, though which of the four they did not seem able to decide.

It worried them that he never went to church and that he had been known to write poetry, for these things betrayed in him a somewhat frightening abnormality. But they did not worry in the least because he apparently never saw them, though his gray eyes looked straight at them. In good time they would attend to that vagueness, or at any rate one of them would. His complexion was the pride of their lives when the neighbours spoke of his fine appearance. It was of a warm reddish bronze that was greatly admired and it came, averred the girls,

because their Mr. Whitman ate heartily of good food and slept in a good bed.

They were confidently prepared for him. And then one day he paid his lawing, said good-afternoon to his dazed landlady, and departed, not for any special reason but simply because he thought he would like to teach in Babylon again where he had once caught eels and lobsters on the shore of the Great South Bay.

The girls were frantic. They felt that in their most tender emotions they had been outraged and defrauded. For a month his name was not spoken until one of them pointed out to her sisters that as a husband he would have been a trial too terrible to be borne, what with his poetry and endless gallivanting around. Gravely they admitted this and thought of other serious faults, and in the end congratulated themselves and one another on having been delivered from his too pressing attentions. But being pleasant girls and kindly, after their first agonized surprise had worn away, they remembered nothing save the lustre of his tar-black hair and his beautiful complexion and his courtesy, which was perfect if as perfectly impersonal.

Walt remained as oblivious of their opinions as he

had been of their plans in his behalf. He went back to Babylon and there practised his original ideas of teaching, what time he was not in New York observing from the shabby pit of the old Park Theatre the mellow rodomontades of Henry Placide in "Napoleon's Old Guard." This artist affected Walt profoundly and he became suddenly devoted to the drama, going to the theatre as often as he had the funds and returning to Long Island crammed with new intonations that thrilled him when he spoke and gestures whose gracious measured sweep he admired as much as did his students.

He took an interest in debating and spoke at various societies in Brooklyn and adjacent villages, on subjects immeasurably lofty, one leg advanced, one hand behind him while the other pointed the way, drove home the point or demolished the opposition with a grandeur almost as authoritative and impressive as Mr. Webster's.

And he continued to write; his small but ponderous compositions appearing now and again in Long Island journals for which he had once worked as a typesetter. His literary muffins were still soggy and indigestible, but it was a day of rugged digestions

and Walt began to be known in the counties. He realized this one afternoon while sitting with his mother. The thought gave him pleasure. He saw no reason, on thinking it all over, why he should not publish and edit his own paper. A rich thought! He was an experienced compositor and a fair pressman, he could edit well, write, he was convinced, with great ability, and distribute with pleasure. Teaching fled his mind, driven out by the invading squadrons of this new idea. He was in Huntington early one morning asking advice and assistance of inhabitants of that village whose fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers each in their several generations had known the Whitmans of West Hills as sound folk, to be trusted and relied on. His plan was indorsed with taciturn but friendly enthusiasm, and Walt set out straightway for New York, where he bought with his own and money lent him for the purpose, a press and requisite types and returned to Huntington, in himself a complete if as yet unborn edition of his journal. To be a weekly, this was christened the *Long Islander*, and as editor, managing editor, and manufacturing plant, Walt for some time busied himself with news and what might be news,

little essays on life and its problems, verse bumptious and bursting with patriotism or lugubrious with thoughts of the grave or sweetly sad with those of tender childhood, with extraordinary energy and enthusiasm. He bought a buggy and a horse of mature meditative qualities but infinite industry and the two might be seen upon nearly any road on Long Island, convoying the *Long Islander* to its destination. When the copies had finally been delivered from the press, enchantingly damp and odorous, and the first one scanned with the familiar thrill of seeing his words, lately but half grown and indistinct in his mind, commandingly black upon the page, Walt would pile them, at first reverently, then with less care, into the buggy and set out, allowing a day and night for their disposition. Down the South Road he would rumble, now loudly upon the stones and now with the buggy wheels muffled and unctuously murmurous in the thick dust, speaking to the labourers in the fields and the farmers who passed him, picking up a child on its way home from school and bellowing his great good-day-to-you's to the wives in their checked aprons who, with their babies on their hips, stood in their doorways and waved to him as he went. These

weekly expeditions of his became famous in the countryside, and the isolated farmers and their families looked forward to them with comfortable anticipation. They would urge him to stop in and "set" and eat, and while he did so the father would speak of his crops as he would of recalcitrant children, inquire after Elijah Stevens down yonder to Smithtown or Fred Ballou over to Comac, show his youngest child to Walt and urge his wife to fetch out the new bread or the speck of cake left over from Sunday. When he went they would wave till he was out of sight, gone down the road into the hazy gules of the far cadent sun, the children on the father's shoulders waving, each with the confident belief that the last fluttering point of white upon the road was directed at him or her alone.

There would be long evenings when the salt wind would draw him with a few friends to the beach and he would swim and eat clams and drink cider and lie on his back and feel the realization of his absolute insignificance sweep over him like a wave as he watched the summer constellations commune silently among themselves with little extinguishings and brighter flashings.

On some days Walt felt that the *Long Islander* had merited a rest, and the general and only office of the journal would be invaded by his friends and a game consisting of catching a ring suspended from the ceiling to a hook affixed in the wall might be played and a pie awarded the winner, or Walt would read his poetry and sometimes other people's.

Editing the *Long Islander* Walt found the happiest experience he had yet encountered. As for Huntington he found the life there perfectly pleasant. He liked the young men and to the surprise of his friends he began to observe with a certain large friendliness the girls. He took them riding in his buggy, to hayfield lunches and to dances held in the gray weather-beaten barns when the harvests had been safely garnered and forked and laid securely away. They sought in vain to surround him with little feminine interests, to draw him into tender personal relationships, but they commanded his squiring, which was a thing not a little to be envied.

Louisa was very happy because she felt that he was come at last to port and that port was close beside her. His life seemed permanently and comfortably disposed of and she foresaw the resumption of their

former close relationship, a thing to fill her days, a deep satisfaction, but Louisa had not yet fathomed Walt.

One day after he had directed his growing journal for a little more than a year, he loomed in the doorway at West Hills and announced casually that he had sold his buggy. Louisa's heart stopped and resumed with a sickening irregularity. Her dreams took wings and disappeared like smoke swirled upon a windy day from the chimney mouth.

He was off again.

It was too true. Walt, having become a little bored with his weekly, had let it sleep unpublished for three weeks, and the only editorial office activity had been hook and ring with its attendant consumption of pie seasoned with his verse.

His backers, tolerant men, more than tolerant with a Whitman of West Hills, had nevertheless finally lost this long and much-bruised patience.

The *Long Islander* was to continue, but a new régime in comprehensive editing and publishing was to obtain.

It was all one to Walt, indeed it was a grateful change for him when, regretted even by his late backers, he took the road again.

In Jamaica he was appointed schoolmaster in the Jamaica Academy and secured a part-time position with Mr. James J. Brenton, editor and publisher of the *Long Island Democrat*. Mr. Brenton, inquiring for his new editor's address, found that he had not as yet settled upon a residence. Why not, he suggested, board with him?

Installed at the Brentons, Walt began almost immediately to experience deep misgivings. Mrs. Brenton proved to be, in his estimation, neither a quiet nor yet a very kindly woman. He had been in the house scarcely three days when she took him aside and with a tender severity in her voice told him that for him to have his health and not to work hard was to cheat the Almighty of His purpose in creating him.

Walter shied violently as might a great red stallion should a rude hand tug at its new-bitted mouth.

Familiar words, growing now something abhorrent in his ears. More than that, the two small Brenton boys inspired him with a sensation hitherto utterly alien to his life. He loathed them. Were he deep in composition they screamed "Wo-ult" beneath his window until his triple-proof serenity was shattered

into jagged fragments. Did he seek to sweeten his coffee he found white sand in the sugar-bowl.

Walt possessed only the satisfaction of knowing why they were so deficient in the most elemental of human merits. He pitied them their maternal heredity.

Mrs. Brenton detested Walt's easy habit of dining in his shirt sleeves and made noises about it three times a day with such shrill, determined energy that she became disappointed if he appeared coated before she could discharge her remarks.

. . . He heard her calling in the children to the table and shuddered, but he sombrely put on his coat and went to supper.

CHAPTER V

THE apple trees in the Brenton garden were in bloom and the whispering fragrance of the blossoms stirred in Walt the active desire never to set foot again in regions where laborious routine demanded his attention. He ate his breakfast beneath the matutinal displeasure of Mrs. Brenton and left the house. He went no farther than the first apple tree. The *Long Island Democrat* ceased to exist for him as he stretched himself upon his back, and, with his arms beneath his head and his feet crossed, commenced an immobile scrutiny of the blue that showed between a leafy quadrature of limbs.

He was profoundly unhappy though he could find no concrete circumstance that seemed to offer a reason for his depression. Suddenly, upon awakening, he had been stunned by the conviction that what he had done yesterday and for the last seven years, what he intended to do to-day and what he would do to-morrow, was futile, utterly unproductive, dreary and undesired. Perhaps he was going mad, becoming,

like his youngest brother, a mechanism defective in its coördination and pitifully halting in its operation. Fear closed about his brain like an iron fist, and for an instant he sought to get upon his feet, to run away, anywhere, and leave this cruel terror hanging in the apple trees like a sinister web with death within its meshes.

Rolling upon his stomach, he pounded the warm grass with his heavy fists and fastened his mind, as one might a grappling hook, in the solid structure of the memory of Louisa. Slowly serenity returned to him, but the perspiration was wet upon his face when he looked again into the sky. This causeless panic had waylaid him often of late, and when he sought to anchor himself by the reflection that his work, his writing, and his teaching marked him as successful and progressing, these crumbled away into nothing, leaving only the conviction that it had no purpose and no character save indirection.

Sometimes he became filled with the ambition to do many things, to edit, to write, to work with his hands and live his days constantly out of doors, to act, to become a musician, to enter politics.

In the end he wanted to do none of these and did

not know what he wanted to do. Recently he had walked for miles in the fields green with the standing yield or upon the barren Hempstead plains along the winding paths beaten white and hard by the cows, his thoughts like millstones grinding upon nothing, and his nerves, usually so slumberously quiet, leaping like taut strings.

One afternoon he had seen a farmer, upon the shifting summit of the cargo of his hay wagon, lose his footing and fall, pitchfork in hand, to the stubble, and Walt had found himself running at top speed down the road, his imagination leaping ahead in horror from the expected scream before waiting even to see if the man had in truth been injured or had arisen sound and whole. The fibre of his mind and his character, it seemed to him, was becoming rotten with indecision, and his hours of morbid introspection revealed to him his abilities founded on self-deception and his ambitions flimsy and contemptible. In the speckled shadow of the apple trees he reviewed his more recent efforts in prose and poetry, and as in a beam of clear impersonal light he found them not good, false-noted blares upon loud instruments accessible to the easy hire of every jack-pudding of a

scribbler in the country. And yet there were things within him which had to be expressed or they would, so it seemed to him, rip him asunder. They were unformed and inarticulate but they were huge. They lacked symmetry and beauty but they were powerful. Like imprisoned leviathans they threshed about in a ceaseless whorl of emotion that could find no outlet.

Brenton, he admitted to himself, gave him every opportunity to find the outlet. Did he write an ode wherein the eagle screamed in a crescendo successively rising with each stanza, it was published and admired. When, spurred to political activity by the resonant thunder of Mr. Webster's periods, delivered in Jamaica in commendation of Old Tippecanoe, Walt hurled himself into electioneering in Queens County, the *Democrat* noted with pride that Mr. Whitman had been selected by Tammany as one of the speakers to address some ten thousands of people in the park of New York and stressed his connection with Mr. Brenton's journal.

"Meetings have been held by our people in various sections, to nominate a candidate for the next presidency. My fellow citizens: let this be an after

thought. I beseech you to entertain a noble and more elevated idea of our aim and struggles as a party than to suppose that we are striving to raise this or that man to power. We are battling for great principles—for mighty and glorious Truths. I would scorn to exert even my humble efforts for the best Democratic candidate that ever was nominated, in himself alone. It is our creed, our doctrine, not a man or a set of men, that we seek to build up. Let us attend, then, in the meantime, to measures, policy and doctrine, and leave to future consideration the selection of the agent to carry our plans into effect. My firm conviction is that the next Democratic candidate, whoever he may be, will be carried into power on the wings of a mighty reaction. The guardian spirit, the good genius who has attended us ever since the days of Jefferson, has not now forsaken us. I can almost fancy myself able to pierce the darkness of the future and behold her looking down upon us with those benignant smiles she wore in 1828, '32, and '36. Again will she hover over us, amid the smoke and din of battle, and leading us to our wonted victory, through 'the sober second thought of the people.'"

Noble words, nobly delivered, had observed the sound Van Buren man, his employer, and thought that, though beaten, the Kinderhook patroon might well have thanked Walt personally. In gloomy retrospect, however, Walt took no joy in them or in the praise they evoked.

No obstacle was put in the way of his expression, but his expression poured through rusty and long-used runnels and itself seemed reluctant and unfluid.

He had come to consider himself incapable of inspiring affection in any breast save that of his mother, and in occasional moments of prodigious self-pity he would arrange his premature decease, dwelling on his own last breaths with sad but solid pleasure. He wished to fall desperately in love, to satisfy in an amalgam of complete spiritual and physical freedom an appetite that had suddenly arisen within him and that greatly distracted his mind from his work and caused him to think evil of himself.

Adolescent, he foundered in the quicksands of an adolescence abnormally prolonged with a convulsive violence, proportionate to a great physical development early achieved and a spacious mind teeming but chaotic.

Gazing through the apple blossoms into the sky, he pursued in his dogged day-dreaming an ideal woman with whom he invested every noble quality of mind and superb beauty of body, to which he added, astonishing himself, incredible sensuality of character, and then repelled with self-condemnation and contempt the image he evoked. He was extremely unhappy, but had it not been for the peevish disapproval of Mrs. Brenton he would have plumbed even darker depths.

Mrs. Brenton saw to it that his dark dreamings did not remain long unshattered. If he dreamt in the dining room she would harry him into the garden, her querulous and damaging comparisons about his head like gnats. If she detected his meditative length upon the unbarbered lawn she supposed, shrilly, that he knew he was as good as stealing his wages and that she was a good enough Christian not to hope that he caught his death of cold.

Shaking his head like a baited bull, Walt would charge away to his desk on the *Democrat*, his heaviness of spirit wonderfully dispelled by his hot annoyance.

Fortunately for his leisure his place beneath the apple trees was well grown over with long grass and

his employer's lady failed to detect him, but at the same time this fact militated against his state of mind.

He revelled there in complete misery. Not even the glory of the young morning could find a chink in his morose and bitter mood.

When the morning was no longer young he still lay there, but little by little, dissipated by a certain emptiness in his physical being, the clouds began to lift.

Shortly before noon he began to suspect that pies were being cooked and he raised his head and studied with an attentive eye the kitchen window. It was indeed so, and once cooked they were being placed upon the window sill to cool. Walt considered them, solid little haloes, brown-gold, laid end to end, with tender enthusiasm and relapsed again upon his back with the warm comfort of having something definite to look forward to. The sunlight, cleaving now directly downward through the apple blossoms, began to soak pleasantly into his mood, dispelling its muddy shadows and revealing his late torment as unnecessary and without cause. He recalled his most recent contribution to the *Democrat* as being, after all, a trenchant piece of prose, phrased eloquently and well.

Mr. Brenton had commended it warmly as work of distinction. Mr. Brenton, Walt reflected, was a good editor and he would miss his assistant when the latter sought wider fields.

Wider fields, in that that term was after all the solution. Walt's recent experience in politics had inoculated him with the passion for direct expression, for talking straight to the people and for burgeoning in the emotions and the effects that his words awoke in them. It was time that he spoke more to them, that he possessed more of them to speak to. Upon Long Island his audience, though reasonably attentive and apparently not devoid of appreciation, lacked volume and the ability to augment reputation and prestige. He was, he reasoned to himself, no longer a boy but a man with the need of a broader scope for his abilities. His self-doubts, writhing like blind vipers down to slumber, gave final and spineless wriggles. Was he competent to speak to and write for a greater public? The memory of the pies, cooling to mild succulence upon the kitchen window sill, thrust caressingly among his thoughts. The sun had now washed in grateful waves into the hitherto murky recesses of his being. Doubt left him without linger-

ing. He was young, only twenty-two, he was as strong as two ordinary men, and he was intelligent, even brilliant. As for the siren sensuality that he had fought against of late, doubtless a less constricted life would rout it. Long Island had been good to him and he would always love it, but the crowds, the sights and smells of New York had become suddenly intolerably desirable. The thought of the men, the women, the children, the labourers and the gentlemen, the actors, the writers, and the artisans filled him with exhilaration. He would arise and get himself into their midst without further loss of time. With supple joints and obedient elastic muscles he got upon his feet, stooping his head and wide shoulders until he emerged houseward from the apple trees. He would, however, take his noonday meal. Mrs. Brenton's failings might be many in his opinion, but in her New England girlhood she had learnt to create notable pies.

When he entered the house Mr. Brenton, just returned from the office of the *Long Island Democrat*, was speaking in a tone of patient weariness to his wife: "I didn't get much help from Walt this morning. I wonder how I can make that boy realize he

has to work for a living." Mrs. Brenton's reply was instantaneous and full of colour. It almost seemed as if she had had it ready prepared and had only awaited her cue. It appeared in the atmosphere like a brilliant Chinese water pattern and as suddenly disappeared. She perceived Walt and fell to summoning her forces. Mr. Brenton looked at him with a baffled frown between his eyes.

"Where were you this morning, Walt?"

"I didn't feel much like working this morning, Mr. Brenton. I just lazed it away under the apple trees."

Mrs. Brenton made a mental note.

"I've been thinking that I'd like to work in New York and if it doesn't leave you short, I'll go along in and look for something this afternoon or to-morrow."

His employer scrutinized him.

"Not satisfied, Walt? I'd hate to lose you. You're making quite a reputation for yourself. And for the *Democrat!*" he added generously.

Mrs. Brenton could have pinched him. Walt's serene gray gaze convinced him that here was no employee's grievance, no petty dissatisfaction.

He tried once more, desperately.

"What about your teaching?"

Walt smiled. "The academy can get another young fellow fast enough, Mr. Brenton."

Brenton gave up. "All right, Walt, you do as you think best, but as I say, I'd hate to lose you. Now, what about lunch, Mother?"

Mother was radiant. She failed even to point out clamorously that Walt was in his shirt sleeves, and when the two little boys capably did this for her she told them to be quiet. Walt remained oblivious to everything save the pie and the growing urge to depart straightway into the heart of the crowds that he saw surging upon Broadway. In the early afternoon he went away and Brenton and his wife watched him swing down the road.

"Good riddance, the great idler," said the woman.

"An idler, yes," replied her husband, regret heavy in his eyes, "an idler, but by the Lord, a magnificent one."

CHAPTER VI

THE sub-editor of the *Daily Aurora* arose from his desk at a half after ten one morning and with an air of expansive luxury lit a cigar. It was his last cigar until after lunch, for the editor, Mr. Walter Whitman, disapproved of tobacco. In perusing a file copy of the *Long Island Democrat*, a journal with which Mr. Whitman had lately been connected, the sub-editor had noted with pleasure that Mr. Whitman had written to the effect that "a segar generally has a smoky fire at one end, and a conceited spark at the other." The sub-editor now found his cigars, not noticeably choice ones, infinitely more to his taste. He always smoked one at a half after ten and strutted between the window and his desk as he did so. At eleven he threw the stub away, opened the window, and awaited the editor.

The editor of the *Daily Aurora* arrived at his office in the morning between eleven and half past. Sometimes he came later. The sub-editor, having thoroughly aired the room, reflected on the easy routine

of those in authority, and arranged the daily and exchange papers in the executive's den, returned to his desk as Mr. Whitman entered the office.

Mr. Whitman, his top hat at an amiably rakish angle, his light whangee slapping against a modishly trousered leg and the blue boutonnière in his well-cut coat still dewy fresh, bade the staff of the *Daily Aurora* an affable good-morning.

The staff greeted him in unison like the chorus of an antique play. They looked upon him with admiration and affection and some envy. They envied him his youth, his health, his pleasing and impressive eye, and the way his coat fitted upon his magnificent shoulders. They liked him for his inexhaustible and bland good-nature and his entire lack of autocratic assertiveness, and they admired him for his obvious creative abilities of which he gave proof in nearly every other journal in New York but their own.

With a debonair flourish of the whangee Mr. Whitman entered his den and commenced the work of the day, looking over the newspapers there laid out for him by the sub-editor. This duty occupied him for an hour, after which he sauntered out again. The sub-editor called himself to his attention and

asked if there were any orders to be executed. Mr. Whitman thought not but observed that he would return at two or three o'clock and at that time he would attend to whatever affairs had arisen during his absence. Once again he flourished the whangee in a comprehensive gesture of farewell and vanished through the door.

The staff of the *Daily Aurora* resumed its duties with renewed zest. The genial atmosphere that its editor carried with him lingered in his wake and made the office more habitable and the air less heavy with the strain of labour. Labour found no place in Mr. Whitman's atmosphere.

In the meantime, Mr. Whitman, the editor, strolling down Broadway to the Battery, had reverted to Walt the magnificent idler. He was wonderfully content. The tenebrous moods of Jamaica and the Brenton household had not returned to oppress him, and he was beginning to find life an uninterrupted pathway of pleasant experience. He was becoming known in the city as a young author of strength and imagination and he was appearing with a gratifying regularity in the pages of the *Democratic Review* with such contributors as Hawthorne, Bryant, Longfellow,

Lowell, Thoreau, Whittier, and the tragic Mr. Poe. Walt twirled his whangee. Good company to move in. It was true that his position upon the *Daily Aurora* did not interest him overmuch, but it carried with it a certain distinction and an undoubted regularity of wage and he had so arranged the hours of his attendance at his office that the best part of his day was spent upon the streets, his mind like blotting paper absorbing faces and voices, and sights and sounds. He drank huge draughts of beer with shaggy labourers come so recently from the rainy west of Ireland that their speech resembled soggy sections of their own peat beautifully resolved into vowels and consonants. With the same transparent interest and confidence that as a child had characterized his conversations with the dockhands of the Fulton Ferry, he questioned men whose faces interested him and drew from them opinions and sometimes confidences whose intimacy, when he had strolled on, astonished them. They looked at his broad departing back with stupefaction and cursed themselves for loose-tongued fools, imparting their private hopes and worries to a perfect stranger simply because there was something in his eye that impelled

their trust and loosed their tongues ere they could say what now.

They had, such of them that did so, no cause to worry. Walt's unconscious integrity never unlocked a confidence thus made to him, and as time went on his street acquaintances turned to him as to a bank to deposit all manner of personal problems. There was about his presence a solidarity that radiated dependability. They sought to know nothing of his antecedents, his occupation, or his means, but they paid him the rare compliment of believing that whatever his livelihood it was gained honestly and with distinction.

Upon Broadway he spoke to or was bespoken by a ship-builder, a carter, a butcher, and a fireman in swift succession. Clothed like one of the young bucks of the town, his top hat and light stick and fashionably tailored coat failed nevertheless to bully his personality into subservience. The latter swallowed the somewhat foppish former completely and easily and his acquaintances, roughly dressed themselves, felt no embarrassment before his splendour.

At the Battery Walt conversed for an hour with the mate of a new clipper-ship bound on the morrow

around the Horn for the coast of California. It was after two when he returned to his office and shortly after five he left the *Daily Aurora* for the day. The sub-editor had during that time sub-edited with passionate energy so that Walt's absence had in reality affected but little the progress of the journal. The sub-editor did not wish Mr. Whitman considered incompetent. He himself considered him remarkably lazy but his laziness was a thing of gorgeous thoroughness and his charm was inexhaustible. Mr. Whitman wished everyone a very good night, smiled delightfully, allowing his fine gray eyes to rest for a moment on those of each member of the staff, and took his way back to the parliament of the pavements.

He dined with a friend, the pilot of one of the Long Island Sound steamboats, Johnny Cole, a bronzed cylinder of a man whose conversation was a perfectly mixed amalgam of stout oaths, shrewd observations, hearty if coarse comment on the buxom Dutch girl who served them, and curiously tender reminiscence of a comrade recently drowned, and who ate enormously through it all, his bright little eyes observing Walt with affectionate curiosity and satisfaction.

Walt filled his spacious being with bread and meat, washing it well down with beer, and listened with attention. When they arose together and walked up two low steps and out on to Broadway, the appetizing odour of the German kitchen still clamouring in their nostrils, they presented an impressive picture of well-fed and contented strength. Twilight was already aboard and the city gentry with it in well-brushed beavers and elegantly arranged cravats, little boots gleaming and sidelocks and whiskers admirably curled and arranged. Walt and Johnny Cole moved through the crowd like sloops of war through a fleet of bouncing fishing smacks. They were going to the old Park Theatre where years before Walt had first fallen beneath the spell of the drama and had revelled in the glittering declamations of Henry Placide. Junius Brutus Booth the elder was there playing his classic Richard the Third, for almost two decades the unrivalled Shakesperean performance in England or America.

Walt attended its performance at every opportunity, and Johnny Cole never visited New York without going to some play and applauding or denouncing with vigour the delivery and deportment of the actors.

He had a voice of the same hoarse resonance as a foghorn but it possessed a far wider range. He also possessed the talent of being able to crack his fingers with such explosive sharpness that actors who had seemed to him inadequate entertainers often fled into the wings on hearing reports which seemed to be caused by a number of pistols in the possession of a great red choleric tun of a man who bellowed threats at them as he shot.

Walt deprecated this digital activity and Cole promised to abstain from it, but at those lines delivered by the first murderer to stab the unfortunate Clarence, "take that, and that; if all this will not do, I'll drown you in the malmsey—butt within," a series of terrific reports shattered the awed silence that filled the auditorium.

The first murderer, in the midst of his bloody villainy, was seen to shake visibly. Consummating his crime he made his exit without loss of time. Walt frowned at his companion but the harm was done. The second murderer quavered his despairing wish that, like Pilate, he could wash his hands of that most grievous murther, expecting that the next volley would not fail to send him after the late duke.

With terror in his eyes the first murderer reappeared. He engaged with trepidation to censure his failing colleague and then concluded the act with his five lines of callous planning, ending:

"For this will out, and then I must not stay."

True to his threat he stayed not an instant. Though he could perceive no puff of smoke in the body of the house, the ominous crack of the vividly imagined pistol clove his eardrums like the thunder of doom. He was gone before his words had even reached the expectant audience. The curtain hid the stage while the spectators speculated loudly and with discontent upon the cause of his panic. Johnny Cole, his great hands hidden, vented sheepish excuses.

"Why, blast me, Walt, that boy's a terrible play-actor. He's got no guts. Why, he never took his knife to the dook at all. The dook was dead as mutton before he was ever properly stuck. And look at the way he skipped about, like a dancing master he was, and him supposed to be a killer."

But Walt was adamant.

"Snap those crazy fingers again, Johnny, and home I go as sure as shooting."

But even Johnny Cole sat transfixed as Booth filled the great lines with a brave roaring wind and blew them out to pit and stalls like a fleet of golden galleons. Walt's spine seemed to ripple in chilly, prickling waves.

"Have mercy, Jesu!—Soft! I did but dream.—
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!—"

The house held its breath. Later Walt and his friend walked the streets in a ruminative silence that had followed hard upon a period of profound emotion. The expressive digits of Johnny Cole snapped faintly now and then, but in a spirit now of awed appreciation. Booth, he considered, possessed a quarter-deck delivery second to no actor upon the boards or blue-water bucko master afloat. On the Battery, the two men shook hands, Cole taking the South Ferry to Brooklyn and Walt directing his steps once more up Broadway.

"Walt, he's a jim-dandy, ain't he?"

This was admitted.

"Well, so long, Walt. Yes, sir, a jim-dandy! Well, so long."

He smote Walt on the back, peering at him ten-

derly. Walt smote him on the back. "Take care of yourself, Johnny, old soldier."

On Broadway Walt walked with the added dignity of an assimilated presence. Booth's royal habit of port became him extremely. With a noble flourish of the whangee he intoned valiantly:

"Fight, gentlemen of England, fight, bold yeomen!
Draw, archers, draw your arrows to the head!
Spur your proud horses hard, and ride in blood!
Amaze the welkin with your broken staves!"

A few days later Walt, sauntering into his office at his usual near-noon hour, was aware of a certain ominous atmosphere, an anxious unrest about the desks of the staff of the *Daily Aurora*.

The sub-editor seemed distraught with nervousness. At Walt's entrance he made gestures of warning with his right hand and jerked his left thumb over his shoulder in what struck Walt as being admirable comic pantomime. He laughed amiably and asked for a clue to all this. The sub-editor, his efforts at a mysterious silence thus rendered abortive, collapsed.

"Mr. Whitman, the senior prop's in your den, sir.

He's been there since half-past nine, steaming like a kettle." Walt, to his agonized astonishment, beamed.

"Well, well, I must go right in and see him."

Straightening his cravat, he ambled through the doorway while the sub-editor mopped his brow. "What a man," he said, "what a man."

His simile touching the condition of the senior proprietor was apt. He was indeed steaming like a kettle.

"Mr. Whitman, may I make so bold as to ask you if this is your regular hour of attendance at this office, sir?"

"Why, yes, sir, though sometimes I get in a little earlier or a little later."

"But, good God, sir, do you expect to edit a city paper by showing up at your office at lunch time? Are you occupied with other concerns that claim your attention during the remaining hours of the morning?"

Walt smiled with perfect good-nature.

"Why, no! I have a very able assistant and he attends to much of the work as well as I could. Better, perhaps. I come every day, but I find my work pretty regularly cleaned up for me."

The senior proprietor in the face of this bland and infrangible benignity felt not unlike a kettle no longer steaming but filled with water warm which was growing rapidly cooler. He waggled his hands.

"Mr. Whitman, I regret very much to say that the interest of the *Daily Aurora* demand a man who will work for them early and late. I shall be, we all shall be, exceedingly sorry to lose your services but there you are. If I may say, so Mr. Whitman, if a man old enough to be your father may say so, you are a very remarkable young man but you are to my mind without any doubt the laziest fellow who ever undertook to edit a city paper. But mark me here, Mr. Whitman, it is not that which brings us to the parting of the ways. Not that at all. It is, shall we say, a point of editorial policy upon which we differ. Let us have no hard feeling. You are, Mr. Whitman, a young man who will go very far. Very far, I am sure of it, but the *Daily Aurora*——"

He was out of breath. Startlingly red and panting, he gazed at Mr. Whitman in pathetic inarticulateness. His eyes held a frantic pleading. Walt smiled his charming smile.

"My dear sir, say no more about it. It has been

a pleasant connection for me, very. I trust for both of us. I shall miss the *Daily Aurora* but doubtless it will thrive without me. Good-morning, sir."

He emerged from his den, now his no longer, into the arms of the bereaved sub-editor.

"Mr. Whitman, it has been an honour to know you, sir, and a pleasure to work for you."

The sub-editor had heard the tidings for himself. The staff echoed his words. Walt shook hands with them all, and tipping his top hat just a shade to the right, sought Broadway, again and as usual very cheerfully, a free man.

CHAPTER VII

FRIENDS of Temperance Ahoy! Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times. By a Popular American Author. This novel, which is dedicated to the Temperance Societies and the friends of the Temperance Cause throughout the Union, will create a sensation, both for the ability with which it is written, as well as the interest of the subject, and will be universally read and admired. It was written expressly from the NEW WORLD, by one of the best Novelists in this country, with a view to aid the great work of Reform, and rescue Young Men from the demon of Intemperance. The incidents of the plot are wrought out with great effect, and the excellence of its moral, and the beneficial influence it will have, should interest the friends of Temperance Reformation in giving this Tale the widest possible circulation."

Walt read this comprehensive announcement with a keen interest and an amusement that grew with reflection. He himself was the Popular American

Author, he was the man of letters referred to as "one of the best Novelists in this country." Park Benjamin, editor of a bouncing and energetic weekly devoted to short stories and novelettes of colourful plots and strongly moral endings, encountering Walt upon the Battery one day consuming half a watermelon, had suggested that he write a Teetotal saga and had hazarded a word or two touching emoluments which, he knew, were always acceptable.

Walt had finished the watermelon and had concurred with the plan providing that his name, becoming familiar to persons of substance in the columns of the *Democratic Review*, be withheld. He felt that he could at times hurl himself in all sincerity into any campaign against alcohol since, implicitly, he abominated its abuse, but he felt no need to misname it in toto since he enjoyed it himself in easy moderation. Still this novelette would offer him a solid peg on which to drape several sonorous generalities on vice that had long shouted within him for expression. He closed with the editor of the *New World*, and being without responsibilities which might otherwise absorb his time, he set at once about its creation. Armed with pencils and foolscap he betook himself

every morning to Tammany Hall, a genial club of Bohemian atmosphere, whose political mentors held Walt in some esteem for his campaigning in 1841 for Van Buren and under whose auspices Walt had made his most considerable political speech in the city park in the same year. With his big person distributed upon two chairs and a table, he devised the character and appearance and grievous degeneration of Franklin Evans with an interest that threatened and finally slaughtered his sense of humour. Insensibly, for the sheer love of declaiming, he set about the belabouring of wines and liquors with an oratorical fierceness that at first startled and then amused the tobacco-spouting heelers of the Democratic party in New York who read over his shoulder and commented in County Kerry accents between huge swallows of beer upon the youthful promise and sad decay of the too-thirsty Franklin. They became passionately interested in Franklin, and in broaching a fresh mug they never failed to toast him. It tickled them into bellowing paroxysms of mirth when Walt, his throat dry with excitement, rushed out and around the corner into Spruce Street to quench his thirst at "The Pewter Mug" with large gin cocktails,

cooling and exceedingly inspiring. The novel progressed with wonderful celerity and the *New World* published it in November, 1842, entire in one issue with its attendant announcement. When Walt read it in print his sense of humour became instantly a resurrected force. He reviewed his paragraphs of sombre warning with an interest grown morbid while alternate gusts of outraged disbelief and giant laughter swept over him. Years later, the memory of his unique dime novel still stirred in him a half-humorous horror. When a well-meaning zealot told him of an exhaustive search for a copy, Walt, his mild voice grown suddenly vigorously insistent, "hoped to God" that the search would remain fruitless.

But Park Benjamin fed his subscribers with fat abundance in November, 1842. The brotherhood in the smoky clubrooms of Tammany read and reread the history of young Franklin with added appreciation. The narrative actually in print carried with it an air of authority that it had lacked when, clothed in Walt's delicate slanting script, it had first met their eyes. They began to consider it something of a masterpiece, after all, and to speak about it as a work of significance produced under the patronage and the

roof of the Society of Saint Tammany. As for Walt, he ignored this child of an impulse with bland but callous indifference. As far as he was concerned, Franklin Evans was in a regenerate drunkard's grave and good riddance and the money that he had earned was spent. He lived in terror lest the august editorial staff of the *Democratic Review* detect his paternity of the tale.

Since the severing of connections with the *Daily Aurora* he had led an existence of even sweeter independence than before. He had put aside his somewhat punctilious raiment and now went about his beloved streets clothed with less distinction but in a manner infinitely more serviceable. He employed himself now in a printer's office as a master-compositor and now in an editorial office as an editor or writer. It occasionally pleased him to work steadily, but not often and never for more than a brief period. Broadway absorbed all but a few fugitive hours devoted to the earning of a sufficient sum upon which to live. The Broadway omnibuses became his passion and the drivers his most intimate friends. He knew them all and they, like the grazers, members of a distinctive and rugged type, recognized in Walt a familiar qual-

ity, a kindred devotion to the outdoors, to a life independent and unsheltered, that had impelled them to their choice of livelihood. Broadway Jack, Dressmaker, Balky Bill, George Storms, Old Elephant and his brother, Young Elephant, Tippy, Pop Rice, Big Frank, Yellow Joe, Pete Callahan, Patsey Dee, and many others, Walt would hail as brothers, clamber aboard their smartly appointed vehicles and spend a morning or an afternoon or a whole day telling and listening to stories and declaiming in the well-remembered accents of Junius Brutus Booth the gorgeous contents of the Plays. The drivers themselves, raconteurs to the nature born, told him interminable narratives of street adventures, of the day that Andrew Jackson rode down Broadway in the Knickerbocker with the American flag draped over the seats and Mr. Van Buren giving the driver fifty dollars for champagne in which to drink Old Hickory's health. The older men spoke in solemn reminiscence of the grief of the city when the news of Governor Clinton's death was announced, and of how it had seemed as if the horses themselves were bereaved, for they had refused to trot and the cadence of their hoofbeats had been in the dreary slow time of a pass-

ing hearse. They remembered the fearful blaze of 1835 when both sides of Pearl Street and Hanover Square had leapt simultaneously into flames and the marines summoned by Charles King had been unable to plant the explosives wherewith to blow up buildings that might ignite, until twenty millions of dollars' worth of property had been destroyed. With caustic passages of description they would speak of President Tyler's wedding and the four thoroughbreds that habitually drew his coach.

"Lived too fine, he did, what with his silver plate and blood hosses. But his lady liked it and I judge he knew his boss." His lady, they pointed out, was a New York lady and a smart woman. The Yellow-bird omnibuses, and the Red-birds, the Broadway and Fourth Avenue and the Knickerbocker, Walt in his old age would recall with affection, for the days that they suggested to him were those of youth and adventurous freedom. The streets excited him as though every face he encountered upon them held a story whose plot he could not dispense with and every sight furnished him with a new aspect of life without which he would never know it. He saw women who held his imagination fixed in passionate conjecture

and men whose achievements seemed to record themselves one by one in his mind, induced by expression or bearing or the look of dominion with which he invested them. Upon the sidewalks he beheld the crowds move on, eternal, tenuous, the ribbon of existence, each individual a unit of information, a word to use in his own interpretation of life, a footnote for his guiding and his benefit. Within him humanity germinated with a slow but rich unfolding. He conceived a friendship for mankind as candid and as confident as he possessed for men, friends of his intimate activities and interests. There were no visages in his encounterings that could dispel this generous friendliness, no imprints of disease or criminal impulse, no signs-manual of defeat or shame. The prostitute and the thief held in his open and unbarred consciousness equal shares of his sympathy and understanding with the individuals whose virtue or whose probity had achieved reward. Walt, preserving within himself the seeds of every human failing and felicity, utterly, abnormally, devoid of personal prejudice, was developing an attitude toward mankind which for a man still in his twenties bespoke a capacity for tolerant wisdom in general familiarly

typical of but few men and in particular of only one. Though he attacked abuses and the personalities that vitalized them, his writings, while vigorous and uncompromising in such cases, lacked the jagged edges of personal animus. Attack upon himself left him sometimes bewildered and hurt but never awoke in him resentment or the desire to wound in return. This quality rendered him spiritually and mentally extraordinarily receptive, and while he neither resisted nor thought to resist the natural physical impulses of a young man, the healthy normality of these compelled that characteristic in the impressions and experiences that he absorbed.

The sidewalks and the streets awoke in him a perpetual astonishment and a joy much like that of a child who in Christmas week is taken through the toy department of a large store under the impression that Santa Claus wants a hint or two. The array of little red wagons importantly labelled "Express" in gold letters, the little steamboats shining with paint and diminutive brass, the gray elephants with the unbreakable tusks and perpetual smiles, the woolly dogs with bright popping eyes, and the armies of soldiers stalwartly marching or riding onward,

whether upon their aggressive little legs or not, convey the same strange glamorous excitement to the tiny individual who surveys them as did the soiled commerce of the New York thoroughfares in the 'forties to the perpetually sauntering Walt.

Work occupied a bare fourth of his time. The remaining three fourths were pleasurably devoted to his writing and to his strolling studies. Latterly he had come to believe that Edgar Allan Poe, a young man but ten years his senior but of a definite and recognized genius, possessed a prose style which to emulate was to attain immediate distinction. His own creations still lacked a certain something of individualism and remained entirely unexceptional. Many were soaked in a sentimentality that Walt, later re-reading them, repudiated with groans. They were disguised in a language possibly that of high romance but possibly, also, irritatingly affected. "Bervance," for instance, "Or Father and Son," published in December, 1841, in the *Democratic Review*, was a grim tragedy of heredity and paternal injustice and cruelty, conceived and executed in this manner.

Bervance (the father): "'Oh, Christ! What a

sight is this!' burst from me as I sank back into the chair from which I had risen, faint with agony. The lunatic started as I spoke, and probably something like a recollection lighted up his brain for a moment. He cast a fierce glance at me.

"'Do you like it?' he said, with a grim smile; 'it is of your own doing. You placed me in a mad house. I was not mad; but when I woke, and breathed that air, and heard the sounds, and saw what is to be seen there—Oh, now I am mad! Curse you! it is your work. Curse you! Curse you!'"

Needless to say it is the wronged son who curses.

Later, in the days of the genuine expression of his being, Walt and such old friends as this did not tip their hats as they passed by. At twenty-two, however, he considered Bervance a notable achievement, and there is the chance, of course, that, for a young man of twenty-two, it was. Walt had secret moments of doubt as to whether Poe had ever actually outdone him.

In March, 1844, he published in the *Columbian Magazine* a short effort which ran his chosen guide even closer a comparison. This was entitled "Eris; A Spirit Record" and contained such passages as this:

"And there is one, childlike, with helpless and unsteady movements, but a countenance of immortal bloom, whose long-lashed eyes droop downward. The name of the Shape is Dai. When he comes near, the angels are silent, and gaze upon him with pity and affection. And the fair eyes of the Shape roll, but fix upon no object; while his lips move, but in a plaintive tone only is heard the speaking of a single name. Wandering in the confines of earth, or restlessly amid the streets of the beautiful land, goes Dai, earnestly calling on one he loves. Wherefore is there no response?" Wherefore, indeed.

But even Walt's eye, as he wrote, missed that indefinable ingredient with which Mr. Poe, for all his neat gin-drinking, seemed able to leaven his writing.

A year or two after the appearance of Eris, Walt, at the request of no less a person than Poe himself, wrote for the *Broadway Journal*, of which Poe was the editor and part owner, a brief essay entitled "Art Singing and Heart Singing," which appeared in November, 1845. On its publication Walt went with lively satisfaction to the office of the *Journal* and up the stairs two at a time though he entered the room

on the second story, which served as editorial office, with a studied deliberation.

The figure bent over the desk in an attitude of peculiar weariness straightened and came forward. Mr. Poe's manner, punctilious after the manner of West Point, was tempered with a Southern graciousness and perfectly courteous. Walt, looking at his clean-bred tired face and forlorn eyes and listening to his voice, low-pitched and a little wistful, wanted suddenly to stroke him, to do something for him, to make him laugh and to smooth out the lines that shadowed in premature traceries the lean contours of his face.

When Walt left, he went softly. The glamour of Poe's work and growing reputation was swallowed in his mind by a feeling of protective pity. Something, Walt reflected, must be all the time hurting Mr. Poe's feelings, to make him hesitate that way after an expressed opinion as if he was willing to recant rather than to quarrel.

Striding along in the sunlight, he had a swift vision of Life, armed with the weapons Poe himself had given it, beating down that handsome dark head and blinding the eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

IN 1846, at about the time that Zachary Taylor's sweating regulars were profanely engaged in erecting Fort Brown upon the Rio Grande to the distracting music of guitar strings and leaden balls from the Mexican garrison at Matamoros, Walt was accepting the position of editor of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*. The offer had in a manner of speaking caught him on the fly between a trip to Coney Island, upon whose hard, bare sand he had a daylong shouted Homer to a few tolerant gulls, and a more extensive jaunt to the northeast end of Long Island, a peninsula constantly replying to the even sweep of the Atlantic surf, where he was accustomed to read, amid consonant surroundings, Æschylus and Sophocles and the Song of the Nibelungs, Dante and the mystic narratives of the Vedas. The appointment to the *Eagle* gave him satisfaction because it seemed to prove to him that he was proceeding solidly to build a reputation as a journalist and a man of letters. He was only twenty-

seven but already he could look back on more than a decade of endeavour to develop a definite literary ability and distinction, and he stood now at the threshold of a wider recognition than ever before. His work in a number of periodicals had determined the owner of the *Eagle* in his choice, and more especially because he had heard Mr. Walter Whitman discussed as an author who possessed as pretty a habit of writing as Poe or Hawthorne or Thoreau or for that matter as any fellow in the country. He understood Mr. Whitman to be a Brooklyn boy and in conferring the position he pointed out that much good influence might be exerted in Brooklyn through journalistic channels by an editor who understood Brooklyn's needs. Always enthusiastic to espouse a cause whose face value guaranteed public merit and beneficial result, Walt beheld the stirring opportunity for a crusade. The small four-paged daily took on the aspect of a lists in which he might break many spears in the cause of civic virtue, and the personality of the owner, the wages, and the hours all pleased him. The political tendencies of the *Eagle* were stoutly Democratic, and here again were Mr. Whitman's qualifications excellent, but politics

was if anything of less importance in the editorial policy than were hearty local pride and interest in newly constructed buildings and city improvements.

"Who," wrote Walt from his editorial vantage—"Who says Brooklyn is not a growing place? He surely cannot have walked lately, as we then walked through East Brooklyn and South Brooklyn. At this present writing we think we could go and count full three hundred houses in process of erection in those two parts of our city!"

He demanded a new system of education, less form and words and more of the spirit of learning, and followed this with an attack, conceived in sarcasm, on an editorial published in the New York *Sun* that deprecated the idea of national consolidation and stressing the fact that the Union was a union of free and sovereign states. Thus matters of local and national importance were discussed, with no partiality in space shown to either save when Mr. Whitman became a little weary of politics and chose as objects of attack the abstract evils of duelling and trade unions, in which case the subscribers were not informed at all of the problems of the Nation. Far

from growing restive beneath this extensive but irregular range of editorial fire, they welcomed and supported it and considered Mr. Whitman a good editor and a bright man.

So Walt found in Brooklyn a friendly and admiring support and a life only a little less hampered than that of Broadway and the omnibuses and the eternal questing in theatres and museums and sweatshops and saloons. More than this, he lived once again with Louisa and his father in a comfortable small house on Myrtle Street a mile and a half from his office, a distance which he traversed in pleasant deliberation and in no haste every morning. Louisa had been filled with deep satisfaction, a cosy feeling of support and sheltering affection, when Walt had come home, paying, as he insisted on doing, his board, and lending the household something almost tangible of his serenity and strength. Walter Whitman, still a carpenter, was ageing, and the multitude of worries and little afflictions that had beset him since, a quarter of a century before, he had brought his young and desirable wife and baby children to Brooklyn to make the family's fortune, were attacking like borers the rugged bole of his constitution. None of the

questions, perhaps but half formulated in his own mind, that he had put to life, had been answered. Struggling for nearly a lifetime to solve an obscure problem the conditions of which no one, apparently not even himself, ever knew, he dwelt too much of the time an introspective life of sombre depression. For his long silences and bleak, uncheerful moods Louisa had never found a cause. Beneath the thick and unyielding cortex of his being there existed a region so sensitive that it seemed as if they were his own thoughts and nothing else, that were constantly wounding it, for in the communities where he lived he was always looked upon with respect and treated with consideration. Louisa had long ago admitted to herself that her love and her devotion lacked the healing power to cure her husband's stubborn unhappiness. Reticent and habitually silent, his feelings never found expression save in a duller disinterest in his eyes and an added forward slope to his massive shoulders.

Walt's arrival lightened his life for a while. It dragged his thoughts out of the well of self-examination and pondering, and in his big son's stories of having seen this and that celebrity face to

face, Walter Whitman experienced a vicarious thrill touching in its candid simplicity of expression, an excited widening of his unhappy eyes, an almost boyish cock of his gray head and a quick "You saw him right close up, son?"

Walt in his strollings had seen Webster and Clay the great compromisers, Seward the firebrand enemy of slavery, Martin Van Buren the pampered old henchman of Andrew Jackson, Fitz Green Halleck and Bryant whom he held in great esteem. His father's dearest memory centred about Jackson, who in the summer of 1833 had passed through Brooklyn. Walt, fourteen years old, had also stood among the crowd and shouted as the old frontiersman had driven by, lifting his white beaver in answer to the cheers, and turning his hard brown face, keen as the blade of a broadaxe beneath its stiff white comb of hair, to right and left. To Walter Whitman, Jackson was the great hero of the generations that followed the death of Washington. A staunch Democrat, he believed in "King" Jackson never more strongly than when he was being attacked, as in the days when the admirers of Calhoun after his rupture with that statesman were pointing to his unbearable ar-

rogance and tyrannous dominion, much as half a century before the Federalist die-hards at the time of the Jay treaty steadfastly believed in and defended Washington from the attacks of the hysterical patriots who shouted for impeachment. In this deep-cored hero worship Walt followed his father, and shortly after he took command at the office of the *Eagle* he terminated a short, commemorative paragraph on this idol of the family with the following words: "Massive, yet most sweet and plain character! in the wrangle of party and the ambitious strife after political distinctions, which mark so many even of our most eminent men, how grateful it is to turn to your unalloyed patriotism! Your great soul never knew a thought of self, in questions which involved your country! Ah, there has lived among us but one purer."

Though "pure" seemed even to Walter Whitman hardly the word with which to qualify the life of the tough old duellist and soldier in question, he congratulated his son on this bit of writing with as much enthusiasm as he was capable of expressing.

"Now, son, that there is useful writing. That's what I like, son. I understand it."

But Walt the editor in the meanwhile encroached in no way upon Walt the magnificent idler. During the steaming summer days he would in the early afternoon leave his desk and stroll into the composing room where, from his high stool and gleaming type, he would rescue a young printer and take him swimming, the two wandering shoreward as though all the leisure in the world were theirs to squander. For hours they would dive and float in the slow green swells, Walt spouting verse and brine in an incessant, commingled feather of spray, his gleaming nakedness appearing and disappearing like a vision of Moby Dick. The young printer set no great store by poetry, but he was an excellent listener, and poetry upon Walt's tongue achieved an indistinct resonance that was fascinating. Broad-shouldered, with flat thighs and narrow waist, he was muscled like a panther and moved sinuously in the water under and about Walt, the great steely deltoids driving his arms in slow glittering lateral arcs. Lying in the sun he would hearken to the sound, never the meaning, of the splendid words with which Walt from memory discoursed, flexing his biceps and stiffening the thigh muscles, striking them with the heel of his hand to

test their hardness, and allowing the vacant three quarters of his brain to dwell on foods he would like to absorb and the disturbing but delightful curves of bosom and haunch that he had observed upon a light girl who had ogled him desperately the night before upon the ferry. He would, he promised himself, forbear to take his wages to his mother some Saturday night and instead, after a few drinks and much blunted bantering, go home with one of these girls. They seemed to like his style. The biceps were flexed. And he needed fun now and then. Here the bunched muscles of his thigh sounded pleasingly beneath his hand. What, by Judas, was the boss yelling now? French, most likely. Thus Walt, passing melodiously from "The Lady of the Lake," plunged into Homer and again into the water, followed in a knife-like, noiseless plunge by the young printer, sound and food and amorous diversion forgotten in the smooth, coördinated response of his muscles.

To fill the gap caused by the absence in his routine of the Broadway omnibuses, Walt became immediately devoted to the ferries that plied between Fulton Street and Manhattan Island. And old allegiance,

he returned to its dominion with the same enthusiasm that he had felt when a child four years old. He cruised back and forth upon them without object, save the desire to watch Brooklyn acquire a foreground of blue shifting into surface greens, and upon this the white murmurous infringement of the wake. And then the diversion remained just as exquisite when New York acquired the same foreground, gray now perhaps, with a squall, or running like a vast herd of snowy fleeced sheep all one way together beneath the whip of a rising breeze from the sea. As he had numbered among his intimate friends the omnibus-drivers and had hailed and been hailed by name when he passed or mounted with them on Broadway, so now did he enter upon a similar bluff fellowship with the ferry pilots. The Balsirs and Ira Smith, William White, and young Tom Gere and his old friend Johnny Cole. He stood with them as they used their craft in nursing the ungraceful hulls through a head chop veiled with spindrift, or when in days blanketed wet and thick in fog they sailed cautiously for fear of collision with the same steady seriousness of purpose and visage as though the cruise was set for the Laccadives and the navigating was passing hard. To

Walt each passage was a perilous delight, an adventure the yield of impression of which was always rich. Sitting in a slumberous forenoon at his desk at the *Eagle* he would write an editorial upon ferries, their steady and ceaseless activity, their condition, the men and women who rode upon them and the accidents that sometimes befell.

"Our Brooklyn ferries teach some sage lessons in philosophy, gentle reader . . ."

In the gradual evolution of his system of life Walt had omitted to include in it the habit of regular church attendance. He considered such a habit a needless and tiresome discipline which could have nothing whatever to do with reverence or belief in a deity. The few sermons that he had heard had first appalled him and then lulled him, unresisting, to deep slumber. But as the editor of the Brooklyn *Eagle* he felt that he owed it to his position to attend occasional meetings if presided over by such men as Henry Ward Beecher, who, after all, was not only a parson but an active and truculent force in matters of infinitely larger import than pewed and pulpited religion. So Walt sat one Sabbath under the Reverend Mr. Beecher at the Plymouth Congregational

Church of Brooklyn and to his surprise felt neither an inclination to run out crying "Nonsense, sir, stuff and nonsense," nor to lean his great head upon his hand and sleep the hour away. While the Reverend Mr. Beecher spoke with none of that polished suavity of address and florid phraseology that Edward Everett of Massachusetts had made the standard of devotional oratory thirty-five years before, when at the age of nineteen he had thrilled the good people of Cambridge in the church in Brattle Square, Mr. Beecher possessed ideas which were as rugged as their presentation and as vigorously conducive to interest. He took a short hold on his vocabulary and clubbed his conclusions home with such accurate insistence that much of Walt's passion for an adjectival splendour waned and perished on the spot. Impelled by an interest in a prose style which was to him a new and more powerful medium of expression, Walt went often to the Plymouth Congregational Church and began to modify his own style accordingly, relinquishing his grip on the model of Mr. Poe's writings and tightening it on another's. Still, however, he missed a completely individual expression, though he himself succeeded only partly in realizing this. His

mind, still pleasantly occupied with the process of assimilation, spent itself in no worrying about his own progress. But this was slowly but irresistibly active.

Politically, he retained his not unenviable position among the Democrats, but the schism that befell his party in the national elections of 1848 brought with it for Walt a furtherance of his destiny. Walt to the dismay of the owner of the *Eagle*, a staunch and devoted Democrat, refused to support Governor Cass of Michigan for the presidency and went so far as definitely to declare himself a "barn-burner" (graphic title bestowed on those Democratic opponents of slavery so determined as to desire the dissolution of the Union in order to kill it), and at any rate the confirmed enemy of "dough-face" principles. Cass, he pointed out, was lukewarm neither for nor against slavery, and therefore a "dough-face." The owner of the *Eagle* grew first pallid and then crimson with rage at this treasonous defection, and when in the New York *Evening Post* appeared the "Dough-face Song" whose author, so cried the open secret, was Walt Whitman, editor of the Brooklyn *Eagle*, he nearly dropped dead of an apoplexy.

"We are all docile dough-faces,
They knead us with the fist,
They, the dashing Southern lords,
We labour as they list;
For them we speak—or hold our tongue,
For them we turn and twist."

Horror! When Walt, consulted about his outrage in accents choked with passion, blandly admitted that he was indeed the author and furthermore that in his opinion the Whigs and Zachary Taylor would win the elections going away, the owner fought for breath and sanity and speechlessly indicated that from that moment onward the Brooklyn *Eagle* and Walt were to be as utter strangers.

Walt amiably shook his nerveless hand and strolled imperturbably out of the office. He intended that night to attend a theatre performance in New York.

CHAPTER IX

THE lobby of the old Broadway Theatre, near Pearl Street in New York City, was crowded with gentlemen in high and shining hats and ladies whose generous petal-like dresses gleamed between black elegantly trousered legs like flames behind the dark columns of forest tree trunks. Soprano roulades of amusement leavened the bass monotone of the talk that sounded to Walt like the delighted discourse of his mother's poultry when she fed them from her back door on the farm at West Hills, the portly hens and pompous cocks ruffling about her feet in a feathery tumult of greed. He stood towering above the majority of the audience, that, between the acts, had left the pit and the stalls to air their finery or to smoke a craved cigar, and looked about him. From a tall girl with jet-black mobile ringlets and a splendid snowy bosom he caught a dark glance of affectionate recognition with that in it which was as explicit as a written invitation. He smiled and had started to move in her direction when he found his progress

blocked by a prosperous gentleman upon whose brightly encased little feet he trod heavily and with crunchings. The prosperous gentleman gave a sharp cry of acute agony and fell upon Walt's chest for support.

"My dear suh!'

"My dear sir, a thousand pardons. My clumsiness is inexcusable."

"Well, suh, I can swear you are no lightweight, but it is the crowd that is to blame. When Kemble plays, you know. . . ."

"I never miss a performance. I believe I have seen her above a score of times at the Park."

"Ah, she's a great artist. By the way, Mr.——?"

"Whitman, sir. Walter Whitman, at your service."

"Indeed."

Walt bowed.

"Well, Mr. Whitman, my name is McClure. Your name is, of course," it was his turn to bow, "familiar to me, and being myself a newspaper man, I intend to give myself the pleasure of asking you to take a little wine with me."

The image of his friend with the ringlets fled from

Walt's mind. Girls were always there, but newspaper men who dressed so prosperously and who spoke with such courteous insistence were comparatively scarce. He allowed Mr. McClure to take his arm and guide him to a handsome saloon on a near-by corner. Mr. McClure bought wine which was tasted, pronounced excellent, and drunk with appropriate toasts, after which he asked Walt what position he was then holding in New York journalism. Walt remarked that he was disengaged and a free lance, whereupon Mr. McClure seemed to swell with a sort of incredulous satisfaction.

Impressively confidential, he leaned forward and tapped his finger on Walt's barrel chest.

"How would you like, Mr. Whitman, to take a trip to N'Awleans and work on the staff of the *Crescent*, a brand-new paper, suh, and a good one with plenty of money behind it and the justified expectation of running the *Picayune* out of business. I am part owner, and I have carte blanche here in the North to buy material and talent, and to put it plain I'll here and now engage you as editor and right here on the spot I'll give you your expenses down, and extra. Two hundred dolluhs and here it is, suh!"

Panting lightly, he produced as much money from his pantaloons as Walt had ever seen in his life. With the bills clenched in his hand he awaited Walt's answer with a face of poignant expectation, ready to fall into lines of disappointment or to light up like a child's before a candy counter.

Walt gave the plan barely a second's thought.

"Agreed, Mr. McClure! Agreed, sir!" He received the bills thrust rapturously into his hand and blessed the coincidence of Kemble and the trodden feet. Mr. McClure was as full of the radiance of cheer as a jack-o'-lantern. He ordered more wine. His attitude seemed to be that whatever the North might lose when the South seceded was actually nothing to the loss they were then and there suffering with Walt's planned departure to New Orleans. Arm in arm they returned to the theatre, both satisfied and one of them supremely excited.

The play ended. Mr. McClure went buoyantly home to bed and Walt, on issuing upon Broadway, found the girl of the lobby, a rich cloak and hood now hiding her attractions, waiting at the door. An old friend, utterly adored, he noted somewhat absent-mindedly this pretty devotion. In the early dawn

he reflected that the night had been in all respects successfully and delightfully spent. Upon the ferry he watched the sun rise over Brooklyn and fingered the bills in his pocket and thought of Louisa's excitement, of the surprise he meant to give his younger brother Jeff, and of the white milk-warm softness of the sleeping girl in the bed he had but lately left. New Orleans, the South, the Mississippi. Adventures, full and pulsing, experiences, life. Mr. McClure's proposed employment had fitted so compactly into the gap caused in his life by his departure from the *Eagle*, and it had seemed to combine so many of the incidental activities which Walt had long earnestly desired, travel and a new field, that in the interval between the wine and his lips his mind had been made up. He would take with him Jeff, who could act in a junior capacity about the office and whose health, not noticeably rugged, would doubtless be improved by the change of climate and atmosphere. Landing, he made his way to Myrtle Street at a gait which, though it might have been considered leisurely for other men, was unwontedly energetic for Walt. In Myrtle Street, Louisa was cooking breakfast and his father was assembling his tools. The sun was

shining into the clean kitchen, glinting on the rows of immaculate pots and skillets and on the copper belly of the fine warming pan that had once belonged to Major Cornelius Van Velsor, now with his benignant old wife beneath the thick firm sod of Cold Spring. Louisa, setting the table, was picked up and swung in a slow circle, protesting. "Walt, you put me down, do you hear? Walt, you're making me dizzy."

Walt put his mother in the rocking-chair by the window and, in a great bellow, called for Jeff. His younger brother, fifteen, with clear honest eyes and his mother's sweet firm mouth, appeared from the little yard, with Walter Whitman, his tools in their worn black case, behind him. Addressing this audience, Walt sketched his meeting with McClure, the latter's offer, and the reasons for his own acceptance of it, and ended with the announcement that he would take Jeff if the family could spare him and that on the evening of the morrow they would start South.

Louisa was utterly resigned, but she told Walt that Jeff was a great responsibility, needed lots of sleep, and had to wear flannel next to his skin. Jeff denied

this but his excitement was so great that he could formulate no words with which to declare his competence to travel anywhere, sleep anywhere, and eat anything. Walter Whitman drank his coffee and remarked that Jeff's mother was apt to gentle him too much and that President Jackson had won a great victory at New Orleans. He went silently to work and Louisa set about aiding Jeff to pack what she thought he needed while he surreptitiously removed what he thought he didn't need. Walt went skating.

Forty-eight hours later the two Whitmans were on their way to Baltimore. Walt to Jeff's imagination seemed calm and superbly worldly-wise, but he himself questioned his great brother so rapidly as to forget what object it had been that in the previous moment had aroused his curiosity. Crossing the Alleghanies was tremendously exciting because in the dark interior of the packed stage-coach every stop upon the way was caused by a band of brigands and every jar was the preliminary stumble that was to hurl them into the abyss that cut away the road. At Wheeling they went aboard the *St. Cloud*, such a steamer as Jeff had never before seen, gleaming with

brass and constantly echoing to the sound of innumerable bells. Down the Ohio, past Cincinnati and Louisville, past Cairo and into the Mississippi and at last up to the sunny, indolent, odorous docks of New Orleans. Jeff soaked up information and diversion as a sponge absorbs water. Walt himself had never been so happy. The great rivers with their traffic interested him profoundly, the new types of men that he saw, the hard-eyed settlers with their wives, strong as the men, for the weaker ones soon died of continued child-bearing and remorseless manual labour and hardship, the frock-coated expressionless gamblers with their courteous ways and waist-bands mutely suggestive of sleeping derringers, the great planters who called at the dock-heads for their mail and a chat over the brandy bottle with the captain about the Whig campaign and the growing unrest in the South, all of this wrote in his mind as in a book new observations and impressions. In New Orleans and installed at the *Crescent* he poured them out again, incoherently and in a prose that lacked any distinction, but there was left in his mind a silt, fine-strained, of all of them and by that was their value later to be shown.

New Orleans laid its spell upon him even before he and Jeff were fairly settled in their lodgings, low-ceiled rooms that opened upon a court filled with sunlight and bougainvillea vines. Preserving his traditional routine of ease and indifference to office hours, Walt wrote his required columns for the *Crescent*, essays on types encountered in the city or upon the river, little sketches of the Creole flower-girl, of the oysterman, of an Irish drayman, writing that dealt in unsubtle irony or pleasant friendliness, perfectly undistinguished save that it showed Walt's mind still fiercely acquisitive and still absorbing. But his writing interested him less than the experiences which every day he encountered in the old French Market, in the narrow streets with their constant, colourful crowds, along the wharves and in old gardens where he drank little glasses of wine and admired the gorgeous Creole women that in their turn saw in Walt's great body and red-bronze complexion, that famous complexion, a type of man alien to their rich experience of men and exceedingly desirable.

In the unhappy inwardly turbulent days at the Brentons' in Jamaica, Walt had despaired of ever

attracting women, of giving or receiving love. In the *Long Island Democrat* he had written with boyish bitterness in his heart:

"I would carefully avoid saying anything of woman; because it behooves a modest personage like myself not to speak upon a class of beings whose nature, habits, notions, and ways he has not been able to gather any knowledge, either by experience or observation."

In Jamaica this was true but in New York in his constant moving with the crowds and his ceaseless observation he had become not only extraordinarily susceptible to feminine beauty but he had found that women and even beautiful women could feel for him love which gave without thought of withholding and which in its complete surrender had sometimes frightened him. He thought in New Orleans of the girl that he had held in his arms on the night of his meeting with McClure, and reflected that her love for him seemed a thing almost unidentified with his living self, for her devotion remained as active a force in her life in his absence as in his presence. Courteous and tender to her always, he nevertheless sought her out only when his inclinations so determined him, and

yet she was not a woman of lovers or light loves. She had but one lover and one love, himself and of himself, and when the first was absent, as so often he was, the second absorbed her care and interest.

It was, he thought to himself, woman and never women, who so stirred him. Idly and then with appreciation he watched an octaroon girl move down the brilliant street in a swirl of her one simple garment, her magnificent body unrestrainedly candid in its revealed proportions, firm, yet yielding, in strenuous motion. As she passed him her great dark eyes spoke like beckoning lights in the rich olive of the face she turned toward his. She smiled. Sexual, ignorant, illiterate, but utterly fascinating, Walt reflected. Smiling, too, he shook his great head. With a shrugging gesture performed as though with her whole body,infinitely graceful, the girl passed on, disappointed but unangered, into the crowd.

There was a very beautiful Creole to whom Walt, in his capacity of editor and man of letters, had been presented between waltzes at a ball to which he had come arrayed in the unaccustomed formality of evening dress. In the middle twenties, of good blood and education and secured position, she had been schooled

in Paris where the cloistered influence of a New Orleans convent school had largely been supplanted by those liberal beliefs on life and its conduct made popular by George Sand. This though the works of that vigorous lady, at that time unsuitably occupied in gratuitously but effectively blowing the fragile horn of the mystic Lammenais, were supposedly barred from her pension. She read George Sand with devoted interest and with a throbbing heart reflected upon her passionate life, the men of genius and beauty who had loved her and whom she in turn had loved. The witty remark of the first of her lovers, Jules Sandeau, the Creole girl rejected with contempt. On Sandeau's supposed infidelity the impulsive George had first left him and then written to Sainte-Beuve that her heart was a cemetery. Some years later Sandeau, not unjustly, had pleasantly remarked that, rather, it was a necropolis, but to the young American such wit was irreverent and unforgivably flippant. She returned to New Orleans, Sand an idol firmly niched in her imagination. After Paris she found the indolent days of her native city slow-dragging and not a little tedious. Wealthy, with a very beautiful body and a serene and charm-

ing face, she was beset with offers of marriage, but the idol of her Paris school days cried out against it in her heart and to her own surprise her heart obeyed. At twenty-five she was a belle of many toasts but few determined suitors for the young men perceived in her presence a certain dusty inferiority in themselves and their injured self-esteems bore them to less charming but more accessible drawing rooms. Then, one evening at a more than usually boring dance, she had seen Walt, and something in his sublimely indifferent attitude as the crowd surged about his tower of a form, and the kindly look in his firm, hellenic face had impelled her to ask that he be presented to her.

She had talked to him of the literature of France, of the agate prosody of Stendhal and the delicate pencillings of De Musset, and, oh, wonderful man, he had listened brilliantly and had drawn her being into her eyes and caressed it there with his, and made no gallant speeches save with his big handsome face that wore admiration upon it like royal bearings upon a shield.

She learnt that he was an author of note in the North, a young man of distinction with a great

future. Walt had called and had conceived for this jewel-like woman a consuming and revealing passion utterly elemental and utterly without the wisdom of reservation. Her little literary affections he discarded as one throws away the shell that has revealed the delicious kernel, and he had found her spiritually as beautiful as physically she was undeniably so. One night, the woman, persuaded partly by the last precepts of Sand to remain vibrant in her memory and partly by the insurgent desire of her nerves to yield utterly to this man's strength and calm supremacy, gave herself to him, urgently, in a supreme gesture of glorious humility that dazed him with the riches that it brought him.

For two months Walt lived a sort of dream, his days devoted to the *Crescent* and his rambles, for nothing in life could wean his interest from streets and crowds, but his nights were consecrated to the woman who had suddenly revealed to him that half of life upon whose vistas he had long sought to look but which had denied him all but fugitive glimpses. It was woman, not this one woman, with whom he spent long hours of perfect accord, physical and spiritual, and whose tenderness outmatched his own

in self-sacrifice and wisdom. But inevitably the day came when, like a half-smothered tocsin, the thought of perpetual union shocked both into a realization that their mutual needs had been satisfied and that in a continuation of their meetings lay danger. Walt's was not the temperament for a settled existence and already he wished to return to the North, for Jeff, far from improving, had languished in the hot heavy air of New Orleans. The woman had satisfied her craving for romance and she had reached in her love for Walt the point when she desired it rather as a living memory than as a continued force in her life. As for him, she had laid at his feet a new world but, having explored it, he wished it not connected with one individual experience, but the laboratory with the hitherto alien equipment of which he might study and reflect upon her entire sex.

They parted as lovers. Both felt that in each other each had found much good and greater benefit. The next day Walt and Jeff had left New Orleans and in the heart of a beautiful woman the niche once sacred to Sand of many loves was devoted to another and much less plurally amorous idol.

CHAPTER X

WALT was twenty-nine and gray. That tar-black hair, with its soft glinting lights and heavy abundance, and the whiskers that in his *Daily Aurora* days had been such a source of pride to him were now black no longer though his hair's thickness upon his head was undiminished and that upon his face was much increased. At twenty-nine his head adumbrated a patriarchal magnificence, but the flood of emotional experiences that had poured suddenly over him had left upon his mouth a certain sensuality and in his eyes an indeterminate softness to remain for a time uncorrected by perfect stability or the self-knowledge of full maturity. With Jeff still rapturously curious, he had lingered on the road from the South, sailing up the river to La Salle and travelling by canal to Chicago, visiting Milwaukee upon Lake Michigan and Mackinaw and Detroit upon Huron. At Cleveland Jeff had become of a sudden homesick for Brooklyn. The firelit interior of a kitchen glimpsed one night from the street had awakened

within him a memory of Louisa's cosy hearth and her enfolding love, and though the two stopped in Buffalo and observed with pleasant terror the awful descent of Niagara, Walt lost no time thereafter in returning to New York. They were at the South Ferry one midsummer noonday and two hours later they stormed into Louisa to find her sleeping in the warm squares of light upon the immaculate kitchen floor, her rocking-chair next to the window and the lilacs nuzzling the panes upon the other side.

Tabitha, the second of the name, whose dam had invested the farm at West Hills with a feline atmosphere of her own and had steadfastly ignored everyone save Louisa with astonishing arrogance, sat at her feet and purred in a tiny thunder that seemed to cause vibrations in her whiskers.

Louisa awoke placidly but Tabitha fretfully. She observed the sons of the house without enthusiasm and left the room. Jeff, upon his knees, commenced a narrative that caused Walt's remarks to assume truncated proportions bewildering to him. He lifted Jeff into the air, placed one hand upon his mouth, and asked several questions with great swiftness. How was his mother? Had she had any

spells of illness? How was his father? Could he have his bed again? Louisa answered these to his satisfaction while she considered Jeff's pop-eyed indignation with alarm.

"Let him down, Walt, and mercy, don't smother the boy."

Jeff's epic recommenced as though there had never been an interruption, and Walt went out and leaned upon the fence that separated the little yard from Myrtle Street. Acquaintances passed by and stopped, thumped him on the back, and asked whether the South was drilling armies yet or how the girls were down there. A few but not many inquired if he had made any plans. They, for the most part, considered his existence as something apparently provided for by nature. They knew him to be incapable of work as they understood it, but they had long ago ceased to resent his laziness and only wondered occasionally now that such lack of industry should bring with it none of the conventional evils, abject poverty or the slack mouth and shifting eye of the congenital loafer.

Walt's plans, learned such of those as asked about them, included no definite intention to do anything. He had thought once or twice of starting a bookshop

or possibly editing a paper or of doing both. His hat tipped over his eyes, the small of his back against the fence on which his forearms negligently rested, his feet crossed and a twig in his mouth, he contentedly reviewed the experiences of the last few months with a conviction that the storehouse of his brain was now considerably richer than before. His brothers, three of them, and his youngest sister, returned home to hear Jeff's marvellous tale, illuminated with countless vignettes of picturesque corners of New Orleans, of the silver magnitude of the Mississippi, of the indescribably gigantic orchestration of the Niagara, and genially disbelieved him, but all of them were none the less excited. They, too, asked Walt what he now intended to do, without any real hope, however, that he would at last decide to turn to and make for himself a steady living and a place in the community. They believed him incorrigibly delinquent in his normal responsibilities as a good citizen, but since he replied to their suggestions and lectures with a bland smile and the announcement that the swimming would be dandy that day, they collapsed in roars of laughter less at him than at themselves and went off to their respective labours wondering

vaguely if the basis upon which they had built their lives was after all the right one and the one that in the end would guarantee them happiness.

So Walt passed the first week in Brooklyn since his return from the South sucking his twig, reflecting upon his sojourn in New Orleans, and swimming the June afternoons away, totally undisturbed by family speculation as to his future. One day as he was sauntering down Myrtle Street a buggy, drawn smartly by a big three-quarter bred bay, drew up abreast of him and one of Brooklyn's most distinguished inhabitants called to him to stop.

Judge Samuel E. Johnson, his high hat pushed back from his perspiring brow, handed the reins to the Irish boy who acted as his diminutive but energetic tiger, and dismounted over the wheel. The Judge was a Democrat, but like Walt's his views concerning slavery were far more radical than those of Governor Cass or of the regular wing of his party. A free-soiler, an enemy of Dough-faces though not a Barn-burner, he had been incensed at Whitman's dismissal from the *Eagle* and even more so when it became evident that that journal was definitely refusing to support any but the regular Democratic

opinions and principles. Judge Johnson was a man of influence and there were others in Brooklyn whose sympathies were with the free-soilers and who resented the fact that in the city there was no organ in whose columns the radicals might voice their arguments. Said the Judge: "Why not start one?" Money was contributed, a small staff assembled, the simple equipment was housed in Orange Street, and all that was lacking was an editor of the right political persuasion who could lend dignity and strength to the editorial page. It had come to the Judge's ears that Mr. Whitman was returned from the South. The very fellow. And what a shrewd revenge upon the *Eagle* to enter against itself, in a fight for the public dominion of Brooklyn, the man who had once led it. Judge Johnson, his big hand on Walt's shoulder, moved him out of hearing of a group of interested onlookers who had recognized the smart horse and tiny coachman.

"Now, Mr. Whitman, if you are disengaged, I think this is just the post for you. You know Brooklyn and you know New York and you know politics. Take on the *Freeman* and we'll sweep these Dough-faces into the East River and strike a

good blow for the right cause while we're doing it. What do you say now? A good salary and a congenial occupation, fighting for a free country and to hell with slavery and compromise. Now don't disappoint us."

Walt had no intention in the world of doing so. He agreed at once and shook the Judge's hand with enthusiasm. He was gratified at his selection and delighted with the chance for another crusade. It had been months now since he had possessed the opportunity to thrust at what he considered the cowardly and furtive tactics of the Democrats before the intimidating fury of the South. He walked home that evening with elation and when, after supper, his brother George idly wondered aloud if the day would ever come when Walt could earn what he ate, his elder brother dug him so vigorously in the ribs that Walt leapt with a yell into the air, and stated calmly that the following Monday would see him in the editorial chair at the Brooklyn weekly *Freeman*, directing the opposition to the disgraceful betrayal of the Democratic party. Moreover, he added, opposing George's counter-attack by completely smothering that young man in his arms, that

he had been offered the post by Judge Johnson in behalf of right-thinking Brooklyn and George might stuff that into his pipe and smoke it if he could.

The Brooklyn *Daily Advertiser* for June 23, 1848, carried the announcement of the foundation of the *Freeman* with Walt as its editor.

Louisa was proud, but his brothers congratulated him with hardy cynicism. Secretly they wondered to themselves concerning the length of time that the *Freeman* would survive, but they admitted that Walt was no slouch as a journalist. When his first editorial appeared they read it with sincere admiration. The old boy might be a loafer most of the time but when he wrote he gave the enemy hell and no mistake, in either prose or poetry. Even as they read the first issue and as Walt was preparing by the kitchen fire an editorial to be shaped on the morrow, Jeff burst into the room with the tidings that the city was burning and that the flames were already on Orange Street and headed toward Myrtle. In an instant the kitchen was empty. Even Louisa ran to the door and saw, with terror squeezing her heart, the red corona in the sky and heard the roar beneath it. Desperately she ran about the house gathering into

little heaps her family's belongings and praying that her strength might not desert her when those waving orange ribbons should float suddenly from the roofs of the neighouring houses. In the back of her mind, calm and blessedly peaceful, remained the thought of West Hills. Evil was in cities and came of cities. She heard shouts and the swift, solid clatter of running feet. Tabitha, her tail straight up in the air, surveyed her mistress with reticent commiseration, perfectly calm. As the footsteps increased like the drumming of a strengthening rainstorm, Louisa gathered up Tabitha and ran outside. A man coming away from the blaze told her that it was being checked but that the business section of the city was in ashes. She sank upon the doorstep and her prayers continued but now they were of thanksgiving. The wind was heavy with smoke and the cinders that coasted through the air in lazy slants looked like little pirate galleys, black-hulled and black-sailed. Slowly, in groups of threes and fours, the fighters of the flames commenced to return. The glow in the sky began to diminish in brilliance and the hungry roar to wane to a heavy murmur. Her husband came back, and, after him, silent, their eyes white in the smoke-

blackened masks that were their faces, her sons. Of the five young men Walt seemed the least weary and the least dejected. To his silent brethren he discoursed on the admirable remorselessness of fire, no weakening, no shilly-shallying, nothing but the steady loud devouring of its prey. The household was long awake, washing grimy hands and faces and Louisa dressing a bruised finger that Jeff had unwisely interposed beneath a hastily secured cask of water and the ground as he was enthusiastically aiding in its disposition. Louisa heard and cared to hear nothing of the conflagration and failed to notice the sombre remark of George as he plunged his head into a pail of water set upon the kitchen table.

"God just don't seem to want Walt to work."

But next day she understood. The editorial office of the *Freeman*, with its entire equipment and furnishings, had been burnt to ashes. She was stunned. Walt was again out of a job and the household expenses, to which he invariably contributed when he was possessed of the money, must sag again, heavily as before, on the shoulders of his father and his brothers. Efforts were made at once by Judge Johnson and the other backers of the radical Demo-

cratic organ to organize it anew, but contributions to its support were slow in being offered and the summer crept by with its erstwhile editor genially without occupation, riding upon the ferries, rolling up and down Broadway upon the omnibuses with his unforgotten friends the drivers, or making long excursions on foot over Long Island, along the roads that he knew so well and past the high-gabled square-built farmhouses the owners of which all haled him and the youngest inhabitants of which greeted him rapturously and protested inarticulately but loudly when he drifted on. Occasionally he did a day's work in a composing room, setting his type absent-mindedly, his thoughts caressing the fragrant memory of the lovely woman who had been his mistress, and the enchanted nights when the moonlight seemed to bring with it the essence of all the jasmine in the world, and the fragile minor melodies of all romance. He wrote spasmodically for various journals short paragraphs of no import, the composition of which, he was startled to observe, rather bored than interested him. His months in the South had borne fruit which his habit of life was slow in digesting. He was restless, and in his mind there was proceeding a

complete turnover of ideas and impressions. He became excited at the wonder of an autumnal morning and something within him demanded the expression of its beauty. Though he had seen many such mornings this particular one seemed to reveal to him the miracle of the whole world, of the men and women in it, of everything that he saw, or heard or felt, around him. Tremulously he would jot down on a piece of paper words and sentences and fragmentary allusions the amalgam of all of which ran in his head like a barbaric assonant chant. The shape of a woman as she walked in the street, the rhythm of her step, the poise of her head, filled him with gratitude and joy. A man, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, sweat shining upon his face and neck, and dirt staining his hands and arms, excited and gave him pleasure. In his heart he exulted in the existence of both and was extraordinarily gratified. And in the meanwhile his brothers prodded him with affectionate irritation, gave him advice as to various vocations which they painstakingly recommended to him, and remained entirely puzzled by his bland equanimity concerning his idleness. They found him, when they returned from their work, leaning against the fence,

his gray hair and beard startling above and about his magnificent colour, in his eyes a look in the utter preoccupation of which they could arouse no gleam of personal interest or intimacy.

September came and went and October, but in the last weeks of this month he returned one night, his eyes keen and on his face a look of alert anticipation. He had seen Judge Johnson, and the backbone of the radical Democratic party had informed him that on November 1st the *Freeman* would once more be a functioning reality. Louisa sighed with relief. The winter was at hand and Walter Whitman was growing old. Prices were high, too. As for Walt's brothers, they grinned and asked him affectionately if even a city fire couldn't down his opposition to the Doughfaces.

CHAPTER XI

THE Fire which burnt us clean out, as we began at our former place, completely deranged the arrangements previously made. We had not much to lose; but of what we had not a shred was saved—no insurance. This time we are determined to go ahead. Smiles or frowns, thick or thin, we shall establish a Radical Newspaper in King's County. Will it remain to be said that the friends of Liberal Principles here give it a meagre and lukewarm aid?"

Thus Walt in the *Freeman* of November 1st, and the Brooklyn *Evening Star* of the same date quoted his announcement. To the undisguised delight of the Whig editors the blades of the Democrats were at last engaged among themselves. The Hunkers rallied round the *Eagle* and shouted the virtues of Lewis Cass from the housetops to the derisive accompaniment of terrific bellowings of "No Dough-faces!" from the Barn-burners. Walt flayed the opposition in the columns of the *Freeman* with a blade that dripped poison which, if not of a subtle Borgian brewing,

possessed a lusty Anglo-Saxon potency that crippled and enraged enemy editors whose experience and craft were less wide and practised. Judge Johnson and Walt's other backers drove home at night, their hats in one hand, the *Freeman* in the other, waving them singly or together and hugging themselves with joy. Blinded by their own party battle glory, they failed to observe the cat-like satisfaction of the Whigs and of Mr. Henry A. Lees in especial. This astute gentleman edited the Brooklyn *Daily Advertiser*, the chief Whig journal, and he never missed an opportunity to divert Democratic attacks upon his own party by pointing out to Walt or to the leader of the *Eagle* forces that the one had but just recently hideously misnamed the other in a public place, and worse than that, insulted not himself alone but the glorious ideals which he cherished and for which he fought. An instantaneous explosion would mark the success of this unsubtle and ancient guile, and on the appearance of the next issues of the warring Democratic organs, no mention would be made of Whig fallacies but the internecine insults would be trebly bitter. Lees walked abroad, like Janus looking two ways, a smile in each direction, but the visage

that he kept for his friends was frankly hilarious.

The Whitman brothers were delighted with Walt's red denunciations. A much-handled copy of the *Freeman* passed among them from hand to hand, and they shouted "Go it" as they read, slapping their thighs and rolling his fervid phrases of contempt upon their tongues like well-cooked savoury morsels. Election day had brought a temporary lull, but the overwhelming defeat of Cass and the triumph of Zachary Taylor and the Whigs seemed to be merely incidental to the Democratic schism instead of its chief issue. Lees smiled and smiled while the *Eagle* accused the *Freeman* of knifing the party in the back and the *Freeman* retorted that the Whigs were infinitely preferable to the Dough-faces. It was all great fun. Walt became brisk and business-like and he confounded his father with political conundrums to which the old carpenter replied nothing save the stubborn muttering that Jackson had been a regular Democrat and so the regular Democrats were good enough for him.

On April 25, 1849, the *Freeman*, hitherto a weekly, was converted into a daily and its staff was increased and its equipment added to and improved. The

Eagle considered with sad amazement these preparations for a more vigorous attack. They had hoped that this windy David would forget his sling and pebbles after a time. But not at all! He was arming himself further. The summer echoed to the din of fight and the autumn saw no armistice and then, quite suddenly, into the *Eagle* office blew a wind of joy and peace. The news was abroad that Whitman was resigning from the *Freeman*. The ace of the opposition, while abating not a jot of his opinions or his fury, was nevertheless apparently weary of regular hours and conventional occupation. The *Freeman* for September 11th carried his truculent valediction and the *Eagle* enthusiastically quoted it upon the same day.

"After the present date, I withdraw entirely from the Brooklyn *Daily Freeman*. To those who have been my friends, I take occasion to proffer the warmest thanks of a grateful heart. My enemies—and old Hunkers generally—I disdain and defy the same as ever.—WALTER WHITMAN."

The staff of the *Eagle* burst spontaneously into cheers.

"Ain't he the damnedest old die-hard?"

"Eats fire like he does his vittles."

Walt returned serenely to a life of comparative idleness though he continued to contribute to the journals. The Hunkers he did in truth continue to disdain and defy, and the Hunkers began to feel that he was becoming a lash too stinging to be ignored. In 1850, Mr. Lees of the *Advertiser* secured his services as an anonymous contributor of Brooklyn sketches, but he did not refrain from continuing to play him off against the conservative Democrats. In the New York *Tribune* for June 14th of that year Walt published a poem entitled "The House of Friends." Mr. Lees read it and arose from his desk with a skip of delight.

"Here, George," he bellowed.

George appeared panting. Though he possessed dignity he was small and the *Advertiser* possessed but few copy-boys so that the life was an active one.

"George," continued Mr. Lees benignantly, "this stanza of poetry with my appended editorial comment will go in the edition, now, if I am not mistaken, going to press. Git!"

George was not, and the sound of his active feet convinced his employer that he was wasting no time.

The *Daily Advertiser* with the publication of the edition in question carried the following:

"When our friends the locofocos fall out, they occasionally amuse themselves by drawing portraits of each other. The schism of the Hunkers and the Barn-burners has been especially prolific of these interesting specimens of descriptive literature. The fun of it is, that a great deal of what each side says about the other is true.

"Here, now, is a specimen of the way one of the young democracy, Master Walter Whitman, lays it on to the members of 'the party' whom he has had the pleasure of knowing: Master Walter has evidently a very poor opinion of his old cronies; but who can wonder at that, after he was in the Brooklyn *Eagle* so long, and saw the operating of the Brooklyn 'democracy'? See now how he talks to 'em; we extract from a queer little poem in one of the New York papers:

'Virginia, mother of greatness,
Blush not for being also the mother of slaves.
You might have borne deeper slaves—
Doughfaces, Crawlers, Lice of Humanity—

Terrific screamers of Freedom,
Who roar and brawl, and get hot i' the face,
But, were they not incapable of august crime,
Would quelch the hopes of ages for a drink—
Muck-worms, creeping flat to the ground,
A dollar dearer to them than Christ's blessing;
All loves, all hopes, less than the thought of gain,
In life walking in that as in a shroud:
Men whom the throes of heroes,
Great deeds at which the gods might stand appalled
The shriek of a drowned world, the appeal of women,
The exulting laugh of united empires,
Would touch them never in the heart,
But only in the pocket.'"

Mr. Lees had further added to this arraignment wrenched thus brutally from its context:

"Well, upon the whole, and considering the opportunities Master Walter has 'enjoyed' for taking a full and fair survey of the cautious old leader of 'the party' it is every way likely that he has hit the nail very near the head. But then, Master W., it is very

naughty of you to expose the brethren—very naughty."

Speechless with rage, the *Eagle* simmered. Walt himself was extremely annoyed, but since his connection with the *Advertiser* was sub rosa and the moneys he received he did not wish his mother to be deprived of, he had to content himself with expressing dignified displeasure with Mr. Lees while the latter looked sadly at him and admitted that now he saw how indelicate it had been in him to have done such a thing.

When Walt surged out of his office the jocund Mr. Lees slapped his thigh and laughed for five minutes. "A mean trick on Walt, but Great Jupiter, what fun! What fun! The Democrats might as well close up shop."

Walt was far less dignified in his remarks to his brothers. Mr. Lees's piece of scurvy pleasantry, he considered, was unworthy of a good editor or a good man. His work for the *Advertiser* continued but it was some time before the amiable manners of his employer won him around again to his usual geniality. In the meantime, Walt had come to the conclusion that in lecturing he would find a field in which he

could not fail to acquire eminence. With customary enthusiasm he set himself straightway to the composition of several lectures on art, on literature, on a multitude of subjects, all of which he left about the house to the dismay of Louisa, who never entered the kitchen but that she found one of Walt's lectures peeping from beneath the woodbox or wandering about the floor at the beck of what breezes were airing the room. Few of these were ever delivered, but at the Brooklyn Art Union on March 31, 1851, Walt did give one of them a wider currency than most of its fellows received. His mother and his brother George attended, Louisa palpitating and George outwardly calm but inwardly impressed. Walt spoke at length with a wealth of imagination on a number of subjects all of which he had apparently attempted to blend into one. He gave a touching description of the death-bed of Rousseau, every fact of which he drew from his own ingenious conclusions. He had good ideas about how Rousseau should have passed his last moments, and with these he painted a picture that brought tears to the eyes of many of the audience. He described with colour and solemnity the Creation, and shortly afterward dealt with the subject of

Death in Greek Art. Louisa was a little bewildered, while her mind still dwelt on the Greeks and their art, to find that Walt had suddenly commenced a sarcastic peroration on the garb of the American dandy of the 'fifties, but George had never admired his brother so much. He covered a wide range, it was true, but how the old boy could roll the words out. As a matter of fact, Walt's voice was not that instrument of plangent strength that the orators of the 'forties and 'fifties relied on to weave their spells and cast them upon their hearers. In the day of such giants as Webster and Everett, Calhoun and Clay and Stephen A. Douglas, most of which speakers the good people of Brooklyn had at one time or another listened to, Walt sounded but thinly, his address was artificial and his crescendoes were poor things, strangely without diapason for so big a man. None the less his presence was little short of superb. His gray mane and beard, his bronze column of a neck revealed in an open collar, his massive shoulders, his whole appearance of an athlete prematurely grizzled, impressed his audience as a more conventionally appearing orator could never have done. His dress was a far cry from the silk hat, frock coat,

and boutonnière of a decade before. The habit that now clothed him was of coarse gray and his trousers, once so modish and free falling, were tucked into boots which did not gleam with polish or impress with their grace of construction. When the lecture ended upon a note of assertive prophecy, there was much applause and George felt prouder than ever. Louisa was radiant at Walt's reception but she privately maintained that what he had actually said was somewhat confusing. The three went home together and Louisa, under the influence of the evening's excitement, gathered together the manuscripts which she had found lying about the house. George was stupefied by their numbers.

"Why, he's written a barrelful," he observed to his mother. "If he drew an audience for each one of those, he'd be a rich man."

Mother and son looked at each other with a sudden swift surmise. If they could persuade Walt to book himself at various halls as an educational and cultural lecturer, the scheme would combine financial benefit and the easy hours that he demanded. Walt was apprised of this great plan at once. He seemed interested and promised to put his mind on it. Aris-



ing after his brothers and his father had been at work for two hours, he strolled into the kitchen where Louisa was baking bread and occupied a third of the room while he read his ancient publication and its opponent the *Eagle*, his back against the wall and his legs extended comfortably before him. One might always, without harm to one's clothing, sit upon Louisa's floors. They shone like other housewives' plates.

He was grieved to observe that the *Freeman* was modifying its hostile attitude toward the conservative Democrats. Mr. Lees had told him that a reconciliation between the Hunkers and the Barn-burners was inevitable and with sincere gloom had agreed with Walt's remark that such a reunion was shameful. The elections of 1852, however, saw the mending of the ancient feud. To Walt's dismay the Hunkers and the Barn-burners blinded their eyes to all issues save victory, swore by the Webster-Clay Compromise of two years before, and swept Franklin Pierce into office and the Whigs out of sight. To Walt such a course was worse than treasonous, it was imbecile. Could not the fools see that no compromise ever evolved, not even one achieved by such great men

as Webster and Clay, could stave off the end of slavery? Reading of the activities of Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois, he alarmed his mother by suddenly giving voice to a low rumble and getting to his feet.

"Walt, don't forget to see about your lectures to-day, son."

His eyes filled suddenly with alarm. "Well, now, Mother, I'll see to it but not to-day. To-morrow. That's all right, ain't it? I've got something to attend to to-day."

Suddenly he was gone. Louisa placidly and yet not without regret bade farewell to his prosperous career as an itinerant lecturer. There was no doing anything with the boy at all. With as much annoyance in her heart as ever found its way there, which was seldom, she observed a corner of white behind the stove. She pulled it out. It was a lecture.

Louisa was, as usual, quite right. Walt was no longer interested in lectures. In fact, he had almost forgotten that he had written any. His mind, as he walked toward the scene of his father's labours, a half-built block of houses in the newly settled quarter of the city, was filled predominantly with politics.

He felt anew the urge to compose, yet not as a regularly employed contributor. He would secure other work and write in his spare time. But politics fled his mind as he observed that the young spring was already dusting with a faint gray green the trees between which he walked.

CHAPTER XII

WALT became a carpenter. To his brother's astonishment, to Louisa's mild bewilderment, even to his father's gloomy surprise, he appeared one morning at a very early hour for him, bade good-morning to his breakfasting family, and announced that from that time forth he would with his father handle saw and hammer to some purpose and devote his days to profitable construction. Since the swift evaporation of the lecturing scheme and the morning when he had read with a certain disillusionment that the radical Democrats had finally and definitely retired from their coign of incorruptible and disinterested public-spiritedness and joined forces once more with the conservative wing of the party, politics had ceased vitally to exercise his mind. The expression of life, its man fold and curious evidences, and its course throughout his own particular individuality began to seem to him the single important object of literary creation. Politics, he reflected one day, were, after all, hardly worth his while to write

about, either in a spirit partisan or otherwise. There were men who made a business of such writing, men whose minds were incapable of anything save a certain gusty objectivity of style both in thought and composition, and he himself had spent too much time in their company. Hereafter he would withdraw from these undeniably cheapened lists and, while earning the equivalent wage with his hands, write under no tutelage and no compulsion save his own.

He thought of Mr. Lees and the *Advertiser's* poor jest touching his poem and the indirect object of its attack, the conservatives of the *Eagle*. He recalled that Mr. Lees had referred to "The House of Friends" as a queer little poem.

A sudden annoyance at the two qualifying adjectives shook him and he bit through the twig which had been moving in little jerks between his lips. Certainly it wasn't so little and why the hell queer! What was so damned queer about it? It didn't rhyme and its scansion was not traditionally conceived. It did not possess the sickeningly flawless measures that the somewhat high-and-mighty Mr. Longfellow was smoothly blackening paper with, but a man wasn't thought queer if he didn't happen to

wear broadcloth and fine linen. A rugged man wasn't necessarily queer. His poem was rugged. Thereafter all his poems were going to be rugged. Mr. Longfellow's poems wore broadcloth and fine linen. Doubtless, so did Mr. Longfellow. He was one sort of a man, Walt was another. He selected another twig.

But Americans were as a type his type, rugged, not necessarily graceful, hard of speech, rough of thought. In New York, in Brooklyn, all over Long Island, in the South, in the West, Walt had seen men and most of them saw broadcloth but once in their lives and never even thought of fine linen. Mr. Longfellow and the poems he wrote were therefore not genuinely American. But for that matter who of the Boston crowd, then, did write either prose or poetry that was genuinely American? Lowell? Possibly, but the man was a professor, one of the Academic crowd, and so actually incapable of knowing real Americans and of expressing their life. Holmes the same way. Thoreau? Too fine-grained. Full of prejudices. His thoughts invested the libraries and editorial offices of New York. Poe, now, had been a great poet but he, too, was rather continental

than American. If one came to think of it not an American so far had expressed the native genius, the native vitality, the native merit of the United States. And there was one damned sure thing and that was that the man who would, wouldn't be one of the broadcloth and fine linen fellows. Neither would his verse. Both would be rugged.

His eye scanned his own rough gray coat and trousers, the heavy, serviceable boots and the plain shirt, clean but coarse. Rugged as himself.

These thoughts came to occupy his mind a surprisingly large part of the time. Brooklyn was expanding and with his father he was busy every day, building and selling simple frame houses and making more money than he had ever made before, even when he had drawn his salary from the *Eagle*. But his mind was not occupied with timber and its shaping nor even in the pleasant mystery of the construction itself, the fashioning of the walls and roof-tree and the gradual forming of the whole. His mind was divorced from the operation of his hands. Ceaselessly he pondered on expression, the expression of American life, genuine American life as he had seen it from Brooklyn to Milwaukee and from Mackinaw to New Orleans.

Walt was a miserable hand with tools. Watching him saw a plank in two, his father would not believe that that was what he was trying to do. When he hammered the long heavy nails home in the clean-smelling wood other workmen would watch the process with incredulous joy. The wood bore at once numberless round little depressions where the hammer had descended but the nail would remain upright and naked, only its point and perhaps a quarter inch of its shining length obscured from view. Finally a shower of terrific blows would drive it solidly into place, but it was the timber that suffered most. His father, craftsman to his finger-tips, a veteran with heavy blades who could draw a line upon a board, hold it upright upon the ground with one hand, and with the other hack down the line with a hatchet or a short axe as accurately and smoothly as though a machine were doing the cutting, regarded Walt's operations with painful embarrassment sometimes but no surprise. If a fellow-builder jested at his son's expense within his hearing, however, he would remark to the jester that his son was a writer, a newspaper editor, and a smart man who didn't have to use his hands, but that he could and would on occasion.

"He's used up loose-mouthed young fellows before this," he would observe with perfect detachment.

The jester, marking Walt's tremendous proportions casually transporting from one place to another a load of timber which would have proved a heavy task for two ordinary men, thought within himself that the chances were that this was so. He would thereupon point out to Mr. Whitman that it was all fun such as he would have with his own brother and that no offence was meant, while the old man regarded him with his brooding puzzled eyes behind which gleamed a tiny cynical gleam. Walt's brother George, however, ignorant of the exact extent of his unhandy use of tools, was jubilant over his work. Confidently he sketched to Louisa just how Walt was finally going to make lots of money and become a stabilized force in the community. "The old boy's got his chance at last and he's going to make a pile of dollars," but the mother entertained reservations. She had thought just such a thing before and unwarily had counted on it. In a reminiscent mood one evening as she listened to George congratulate Walt placidly engaged in eating new apple pie, she thought of the *Long Islander* and the horse and buggy which

had seemed to her such an anchor, a guarantee of his willingness and desire to stay put. She had lost count of the ventures upon which her second son had embarked and which, inexplicably and with satisfaction, he had shortly after deserted.

George was young. It was his belief that until this time Walt had never found what he was looking for, had never really satisfied his bent. His newspaper work had been after all only an experiment, and his writing a frustrated effort to exhaust the energy which had been diverted from its proper channel, that of steady manual labour and normal physical effort. In Louisa, in George and in Jeff, his favourite brother, Walt found his staunchest and most affectionate allies in his family. Jesse, his oldest brother, had so far proved himself a disappointment and indeed his mentality seemed impaired, though why this lamentable degeneration had taken place no one knew or, if they did, none spoke of it. Dully, he considered Walt a queer fish, and the two held no sympathies in common and seldom spoke to each other. George, in discussing Jesse's manifest deterioration, remarked for Walt's private ear that the man was, by continual and corroding dissipation, rendering himself imbecile,

Walt, who had seen his senior but seldom since the two were boys, was painfully shocked and sought thereafter to lead Jesse into conversation, to interest him in topics in which, as children, they had taken kindred pleasure, but the charm of reminiscence proved unavailing. Walt found that he did not know his brother and became sadly aware that he did not really wish to know him. There was, he felt, a muddiness in Jesse, the vents of his spiritual being were choked with dirt. With Andrew it was much the same and with Edward, the youngest, there was, of course, no possible communication and for him no emotion save pity. An idiot since birth, he was cared for tenderly and without complaint, though it wrenched Louisa's heart to see now and again in the pitiful empty eyes a swift vision of terrible struggle to understand, inarticulate and unavailing. Walt made him little steamboats out of blocks and chips of wood.

But George and Jeff were clean-fibred, strenuous, and hard. They did not understand their idling, imperturbable brother but they subconsciously relied upon him, feeling that he was staunch and inexplicably admirable. There was a strength about him

which, though unlike their strength, they respected and drew upon.

To Louisa's astonished gratification, for a time George's rosy prophecies concerning Walt's latest venture seemed to be coming true. He no longer lay abed until the late hours of the morning to appear for a few minutes in the sunny kitchen and then drift away not to reappear again until the lamps had been lit and his father and his brothers were knocking out their pipes preparatory to going to their beds. Prompt as his father, he now breakfasted and strode out to his work with a regularity that surprised even himself. But with him for the day went a book, worn with handling and much carrying in pockets that also accommodated nails and smaller tools, a book that he read while the other men at noon lay smoking, their heads pillowed on their coats, their thoughts somnolently engaged with mythical beers and more satisfying tobaccos. Astride of a beam, his feet dangling into the bright interior of the skeleton of the rising house, Walt would read Homer and Æschylus, his lunch beside him, and about the poise of his gray head, dropped upon the massive chest, an air of Rhadamanthine prescience. He read the French

poets and memorized words the pronunciation of which filled him with satisfaction. Never a linguist, there were words of whose meaning he was vaguely conscious and whose use oddly appealed to him as being more expressive or melodious than their English equivalents. When the noon hour of food and rest was exhausted and below him and about him the process of loud construction was resumed, he would put away his book and punctuate his curiously futile attempts at craftsmanship with the sonorous repetition of these words, mispronounced but impressive in their alien rotundity.

The little houses that his father put up with his generous if misapplied assistance were always sold almost upon completion, and the fortunes of the family waxed with gratifying swiftness. Walter Whitman bought a larger house and the home in Myrtle Street was vacated, a nomadic experience that was old to Louisa, to whom a constant change of domicile had long ago taught never to invest in any one house the full value of her affection for permanence and domestic solidity. Nevertheless, she always left the old habitation with sadness in her heart, for in every one she was forced to desert memories

that had grown dear to her and associations that she could not forget. Sometimes it seemed to her that if, from the shadows of every house in which she and her husband and their children had lived, she might collect all these, if she might have them with her all in one house, she need never fear old age or loneliness or sorrow. Like the interest on invested principal, her memories would support her. But memories were things by which Walter Whitman set no store. Indeed he seemed happier forgetting.

It was after they had got settled in the house on Portland Avenue that Louisa's own belief touching Walt's genuine devotion to his trade began to prove justified. George, descending to breakfast one morning, saw with some misgiving that Walt was not at his accustomed place. Walt was still abed. He did not appear and his father set out alone. The next day brought the same ominous absence of the junior member of the carpentering partnership, and George bounced from his chair at the table and ran upstairs to his brother's room. He found Walt lying abed, writing, his knees drawn up, a small blank-book against them and a number of loose pages scattered about the floor.

"Father's waiting for you, Walt."

"Well, George, I'm not going to work to-day. Got some writing to do."

George gazed at him in anguished amazement. "But, Walt, you've got the shingling to do on Frank Holt's house."

Walt beamed at him. "I'm no hand at shingling, George, and besides, I'm about through with building. I've got a book to make. Ask Mother to keep some coffee hot for me."

He wrote a word, smiling, in the blank-book. Heavily, George turned and went downstairs. His father, a suggestion of a smile about his full-lipped, line-framed mouth, picked up his tools and left the house, without pausing to hear him speak.

Louisa had already put Walt's breakfast in the oven to keep it warm. With puzzled, forlorn eyes, George looked at her. "Walt's quit work, Mother. He's lying in bed writing."

"Maybe he's feeling bad, son."

"No, he ain't. The old loafer's as strong as a bull."

He kissed Louisa gloomily and went away. Quietly the mother cleared the table and washed the dishes.

Occasionally from above she heard Walt's voice. A word, a phrase, that sounded loudly in the silent house, like a challenge, a prophecy, the utterance of a seer.

CHAPTER XIII

I HAD great trouble in leaving out the stock poetical touches but succeeded at last." Years afterward Walt spanned the almost incredible gap between his early verse and "Leaves of Grass" with this remark. As he lay abed in the big house on Portland Avenue, his pencil busied itself ceaselessly with crossing out words and phrases, with idle ruminative scrawlings and eventual swift revision. He worked slowly, fighting for the stark expression of his being, of his thoughts, of all that wealth of impression and sensation that he had been garnering since, as a child old enough to realize the functions of his senses, he had haunted the Brooklyn ferries and the roads and shore paths of Long Island. Late in the morning he would descend into the kitchen and with preoccupation drink several cups of coffee, neglecting the newspaper and answering with vague monosyllables the affectionate, familiar, and distracting conversation of his mother. Then, with his pencils and his blank-book, his worn note-books and scribbled fragments, he

would set off either for New York or down the Island, to compose and destroy and compose again until long after the lamp in the kitchen at home had been finally extinguished by Louisa, who knew that to await him were useless.

There were times when the atmosphere of the house, the silence, the faint smell of cooking, the persistent peevish buzz of flies concerned with their disrespectful explorations, and even Louisa's occasional words to Tabitha, awoke within him sudden volcanic revulsions of feeling for his home, and he would leave the house to seek out some uninhabited stretch of beach or unfenced plain and there stay for a day and sometimes sleep there, without walls or ceiling, curiously content. He completed the first text of his book and departed with it to Orient Point on the northeastern shore of Long Island to read it in its entirety. He was so excited that he kept his hand upon it in his pocket lest by some malison of chance it disappear, lost, dropped as he walked, to disintegrate again into the soil from which, assuredly, it had come. Almost running, he gained his windless corner upon the windy promontory, a sort of doorway formed of basaltic boulders and blocked by the bulk

of the smooth massing of the sand, damp and salt-smelling. A corner was dry and pillowed with a white and a softer sand, and it was here that Walt sat down, took off his hat, and, with his big hands shaking a little, took his manuscript from his pocket. The strong clean wind blowing in from the sea sang over his gray head, of rain and the blue restless profundity of the Atlantic, of ports of Spain and fleets of sailing whales, but for once he did not listen to it. After months of grievous travail he was about to examine for the first time the child, the essence of whose being was his essence, upon whose worth his own depended and would depend. Hidden in his echoing corner, he would have been invisible—a walker upon the beach would have observed no hint of his presence for four hours, four hours during which the tide swept clattering up the shingle and the wind called in dark clouds from the sea and the sun ran down its arc until it touched the horizon at his back. Four hours of silent, sweating, wrenching agony. Four hours of death. And the last minute of the fourth hour was of destruction.

As he read, Walt tasted a worse bitterness than that of defeat. The ashes of extinguished confidence

darkened his eyes and dulled his mind as he read. He had striven to translate his own body and mind into ink and write it upon paper that the world, but above all, his country, might possess him, a real American, a true man, a typical unit of mankind. He had failed. The poems were unusual but they were cant, mouthings without significance or original merit. Lacking melodious rhythm and pleasing rhymes, they were nothing. Within him what he wanted to say, what in them he had tried to say, still tore him to be expressed, to be given their freedom, but he, the jailer, remained inarticulate. Dully, mechanically, he read his poems through. For a minute he sat silent, his senses, even his muscles, numb. Then with a sobbing roar he leapt to his feet. The manuscript of hope, the book of his bone and blood, his first child, "Leaves of Grass," left his hand in fluttering, slanting flight and met the sea. He watched it swim awhile, the sheets dipping once or twice whitely into sight, drifting one by one away from each other and finally disappearing. Incredulously he watched them go. Tears ran down his cheeks into his beard and he turned his big soft hat in his hands and stamped with his feet as a child

who has hurt his fingers will kick the hard surface of a wall to take his mind and his senses away from the real pain and distribute more comfortably his reactions. Walt was a child, a great gray-bearded child whose eyes were tragically bewildered, who had found himself suddenly without courage or confidence and who had hurt himself terribly. It was very late in the following evening when he returned to Brooklyn. He had walked for hours fighting a fear that kept tugging at his mind, prodding it, teaching it a refrain that he could not forget. Nothing at all but a mediocre journalist. Nothing at all, after all. Nothing to say at all. Nothing to say, after all. Nothing at all but a mediocre journalist. Nothing at all, after all. The rhythm of his thoughts had driven him through a night and a day insensible of weariness and almost of hunger. Gradually they came to form a wheel that winnowed the layers of material in his mind, and as it did so his confidence began to return. For there was no chaff. His powers of expression were still faulty but what he had to express remained sound and vital, awaiting deliverance. He would strive again and if need be again and again until there could be no possibility of miscarriage. At midnight

after more than twenty-four hours of journeying, physically spent and ravenous, he came home through the kitchen window, a mode of ingress made possible by the stealthy connivance of Louisa. Over his head, awake at the side of his heavily sleeping father, his mother heard him stumbling in the dark. A door opened below her and she heard the tinkle of china. Silently she slipped out of bed and, lighting a candle, went downstairs. Walt had lighted the lamp and was eating bread from the loaf, biting chunks and chewing them with concentrated energy, his hat on the back of his head, his elbows on the table, and his feet in their heavy dusty boots thrust under his chair.

"My gracious, son, you're a regular night bird. You're worse than Tabitha. Why, you're starving. Now, wait a minute, and I'll get you something civilized. There's some potatoes and just a mite of pie left from supper."

She went composedly about the kitchen, Tabitha following with courtesy but no enthusiasm, her tail undulating softly. As she put food before him Walt put his big arm about her shoulders and drew her head down. He kissed her, nuzzling her cheek like a child. Louisa cackled gently. "Those dratted

whiskers tickle. Go on now, son, and eat and be quiet coming to bed."

Her white figure with the rosy face beneath the snowy cap disappeared into the darkness of the stairs, the candle flame like a little yellow flag ascending till it, too, was swallowed in the shadows. Tabitha remained discontentedly moving in noiseless zigzags over the kitchen floor. Tabitha slept in the kitchen though the arrangement had never pleased her. With the lamp at his right casting one side of his face into deep shadow and revealing in the other side the mobile relief of every muscle as he chewed, his eyes intently fixed on nothing, in one hand a slice of pie and in the other a tumbler of warm milk, Walt ate with patient industry. He was, Tabitha thought, as the milk irrevocably disappeared, in many ways hardly a gentleman. Louisa, dropping off to sleep, heard him upon the stairs, mounting with infinite pains to be stealthy and about as inaudible, she drowsily reflected, as the crack of doom.

The next morning Walt lay long abed: his blank-book against his knee, his pencil at work, but moving very slowly, his mind struggling against the shackles of formalism that had so long encumbered it. The

second text grew and was finished, was read and was destroyed, but Walt had thrown off for ever the fear that had beset him concerning the ultimate worth of what he sought to say. He laboured with all the patience inherited from his Dutch forbears on the fashion of its saying, convinced that he would in time succeed. There were wrought a third, a fourth, and a fifth manuscript, and each was in turn ruthlessly condemned and sent the way of its defective predecessors. Finally, the sixth, after months of rigorous revision and excision, achieved completion. It was put away to acquire the beneficial unfamiliarity of perspective that it needed, for Walt had been too long at work upon, was too close to, it to feel concerning it a critical impartiality. In the meantime, his brothers, but George in particular, spent much time in attempting to guess what it was that kept him so fiercely preoccupied, existing in a state of perpetual beatitude, uncommunicative and, for the most part, utterly silent. His retirement from carpentry had been a shock to George. Walt had become in his mind the incarnation of wilful idleness, a loafer who had proved himself capable of prosperous and productive labour and who had, with riches, honestly to be

earned, in sight, refused their conquest for a leisure which was, if not precisely ignoble, certainly not creditable. With bewildered, disappointed eyes he observed his brother's meditations with indignation, and a scorn, to harbour which was difficult, for it was not a sincere emotion. There was that in Walt against which scorn might not honestly prevail, and that this should be so made George the angrier. Why should the damned fellow seem so admirable, his appearance so commanding and so filled with native dignity when he was, after all, nothing but a loafer? There was no sense to it.

But the family's conjectures and wonderings touching Walt were to be dispelled by an occurrence of far more serious import than this enigmatic idling. Walter Whitman, like an oak dying from within its rugged exterior, suddenly broke down. His appearance, that look of hard, gnarled strength, did not change but the will to live seemed suddenly to suffer dissolution. He returned from his work one evening and sank heavily into his wife's old rocking-chair in the kitchen while Louisa bustled about from stove to pantry closet, intent on the preparation of supper. The late afternoon darkened into twilight and the

lamp was lit, but Walter Whitman by the black opacity of the window-panes sat in the shadow. His sons returned and Louisa, aided by her daughters, put the hot dishes upon the table.

"Come, Father, supper's ready." She turned toward him. There had been no response. He might be sleeping, but it was strange that he had not washed his face and hands. He was always so scrupulously clean in the care of his person.

"Come, Father, now. Supper's ready." The young men had stopped talking.

"Walter." It was almost a scream. Walt was on his feet and by his father with a smooth swiftness astonishing in so large a man. The old carpenter, his hands gripping the arm-pieces of the chair, sat, his head on his chest, curiously flattened, as though sodden, motionless. For a moment his son thought that Death had already made its silent sally into that noisy kitchen. Then, in the lamplight, he saw the eyes gleam. Tenderly, with awkward monosyllables of compassion and affection, the sons carried their broken giant of a father to his bed. Louisa, after her first terror-stricken cry, became a quiet marvel of efficiency and care the more touching for its restrained

emotion. George went for the doctor, his passage from the house a tumult of speed. Silently, the brothers descended again into the kitchen. Above them they could hear Louisa, soft-footed, in their father's room. Walter Whitman had not uttered a sound.

Footsteps on the stoop and a voice of incongruous cheerfulness heralded the arrival of the doctor. He entered the kitchen, a stout old gentleman whose urbanity deceived many of his patients by causing them to think that his skill was not noticeably great and that he sought to hide the fact by his genial manner. He was, in reality, a man of wide medical learning who had studied in Europe and whose private fortune had saved him from the narrowing influences of country practice. As a physician he had no superiors either in Brooklyn or in New York, but he preferred his patients to be people of small or moderate means since it was in them that he found the genuine tyranny of malady resolutely ignored for a lack of funds to dispel it. He had known Walter Whitman for thirty years and had brought four of his children into the world.

The young men rose.

"Well, boys, what's all this that George tells me?"

Walt took his hat and the worn black satchel. "The old man's been taken very bad. He don't speak and he can't move very easy."

"Well, he's old, Walt, he's old and he's worked hard. He's tired, it's likely, and needs a long rest. Howdy, Jeff. Don't look so glum, son. Walt, you old loafer, take me upstairs."

Chuckling, he followed his guide out of the kitchen. Walt returned.

"What's he say, Walt?"

"Nothing yet. He's in with Father and he sent Mother out. She's outside the door listening like thunder."

The food on the table stood untouched. Occasionally some one of them cleared his throat, another scraped his feet. Tabitha walked beneath the table and investigated the saucer that stood there. It was empty. Her supper also was delayed.

The door upstairs opened and the sons heard their mother's voice, fictitiously calm, repeating the doctor's instructions. The latter's booming tones suddenly lifted the sick depression that had lain upon the kitchen. The supper was attacked. Nothing much





could be wrong if old Pills could sound like that. Beaming, the doctor reëntered the room.

"Well, boys, he needs a rest. Nothing to worry about. A little fresh air out in West Hills will cure him like that." He snapped his fingers.

"Have a cigar, Doctor."

"Have some whiskey, Doctor. Jesse, fetch the whiskey."

"Set and have a bite to eat, Doctor."

Relief shook in the voices that suddenly were released.

"No, thanks, boys. Well, maybe a cigar. Eat hearty, eat hearty. Walt, walk down to the buggy with me."

He went out, Walt behind him, and their footsteps died upon the young grass.

"Son, your dad's a sick man. He'll live awhile yet but not long. He's worked out. The mainspring's worn out. Now what you do is this. You hitch up to-morrow and take him back to the farm. He hankers to go there and it'll do him good. If he'll take it easy, he may be good for years yet, but I know the old fool, and he'll be sawing wood before the week's out. But don't you let him. Keep him quiet

and feed him up and make him sleep. I've told your mother what he can eat and what he can't. The two of you ought to be able to boss him, and if he's going to live he's got to be bossed."

He climbed into his buggy and untied the reins from the whip-rack.

"Good-night, son. Don't worry. Go on home, now, Nell. Git!" The buggy rolled away, the bulky figure in the seat for an instant black against the stars low on the horizon.

The next morning, when the men had gone to work, Walt hitched up his father's horse to the family carriage and with Louisa and Walter Whitman in the back seat drove off to West Hills. The morning was beautiful, it was June, and the fields were green. To Louisa, it seemed as though all along this return had been inevitable, a retreat, unvictorious, for a life-long campaign against odds which had proved too great, which she had known would prove too great. Her husband had deserted his heritage and the soil of his fathers for the conquest of a city and the city had, in the end, triumphed as she had known it would. Thirty-two years of toil and now the end. The wheels creaked not unmelodiously, like birds

conversing. Walt, driving, let the horse slow up to a walk. Thirty-two years and she was bringing her husband home to what? An old and empty house and fields which had too long lain fallow. A hearth from which the children of the house had these many years been weaned and so was insecure, cold, and a little crumbling. There was something ironical about the season of this home-coming. There should have been a Novembral sharpness in the air, a barren grayness upon the earth and trees and not this teeming warmth and fecund riant colour. Louisa checked her thoughts and talked a little.

"Walter, do you remember, when I was a girl, I used to ride along this road on the bay that Father bought in Yonkers in the year of the war? Forty-three years ago that was. And Farmer Tooker left his wife and ran away to join the sailors on Lake Champlain."

"Forty-three years, Lou. And here I am a broken-down old plug going home to die in my stall."

The sick man's voice, lifeless, preserved a note of chagrin, like that in a disappointed child's. She had, Louisa thought, sounded the wrong note. Walt laid his whip gently on the horse's neck and the carriage rolled faster between the fields. The day was ageing.

CHAPTER XIV

A FORTNIGHT before his father's illness, Walt with the last and definitive manuscript of his book in his hand had gone to the printing establishment of Andrew and James Rome on the corner of Cranberry and Fulton streets and had arranged with them to set up his text himself, exactly as he wished it. Returned from West Hills, he went immediately to work. The first week in July, 1855, saw "Leaves of Grass" practically completed and the brothers Rome reading the checked-over galleys that Walt stowed away in their cubby-holes, their eyes popping with excitement.

"Andy, this is crazy stuff."

"Mebby."

"Is this poetry, Andy, do you figure?"

"Mebby."

"Anybody going to buy this stuff, Andy, do you figure?"

"Mebby."

The brothers Rome were much intrigued but they

were cautious men. Where the cat jumped there jumped they, and if "Leaves of Grass" was going to prove an instrument that might harm their standing in Brooklyn they did not care to handle it too carelessly. The book appeared, a thin quarto, green cloth, decorated with flowers, with the title upon both covers, in gilt lettering, highly ornamental. Opposite the title page, engraved on steel from a daguerreotype taken in 1854, in a pose easy, graceful, almost a slouch, was Walt's likeness. He looked at the reader with an expression at once quizzical and tender, his somewhat sensual mouth ready to smile.

The book bore no publisher's imprint. The Romes had suggested an edition of a thousand copies but only eight hundred were actually printed. To all his old acquaintances of the press Walt sent copies, and the remainder were put on sale in Brooklyn, Boston, and New York.

Then he with the brothers Rome waited to see which way the cat would jump. Newspaper clippings of reviews came one morning in an envelope, assiduously collected and sent by a friend in New York.

"Muck," cried the New York *Criterion*. "Muck and obscenity." This was a blow.

"Walter Whitman is as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics," announced the London *Critic*. This, too, hurt shrewdly.

"Bombast, egotism, vulgarity, and nonsense," observed the Boston *Intelligencer*, and the Boston *Post* underscored its "exulting audacity of Priapus-worshipping obscenity."

Dear God! . . . But, hell! Boston!

"Impious libidinousness" and "ithyphallic audacity," contributed by the *Christian Examiner* of that city, filled the Romes with alarm. These, surely, were names of diseases. Was there a contagion in this book to be avoided?

Mercifully, two weeks after its publication, there arrived in the mail a letter from no less a person than Emerson himself, the Brahmin of all the Brahmins, the intrenched sage of Concord, the great genius of the Nation. Praise from Sir Hubert, and what praise.

"I give you joy of your free and brave thought."—Walt glowed—"I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things, said incomparably well, as they must be."

This was stuff to wipe the stings of any attack

clean out of existence and with which to advertise a book as no book had ever before been advertised. And what a clarion call of welcome was this.

"I greet you at the beginning of a great career . . ."

Greeted by Emerson! Walt leapt to his feet and for a minute the Romes thought that he was about to dance. What advertising, what superb advertising this was if he might use it. A buzz of satisfaction from the printers checked, for an instant, his luminous imaginings. They had found another favourable critique. He looked at it. It looked astonishingly familiar and then he recognized it. It was one of his own. With absolute and candid belief in his book he had planned a campaign of self-criticisms and sent them out in order that at the proper time the world might be made aware of his arrival. They had been swamped beneath the rush of abusive outpourings, but now that he had Emerson's letter he could afford to disregard not only his own but his enemies' opinions. With the magic words in his hands he went to his mother's house, a house now filled with a silence heavier than before, for Louisa was a widow. On July 11th, a day or two after Walt's book had appeared and barely a month after

he had been taken home to West Hills, Walter Whitman joined his yeoman ancestry in the sunny unshorn graves upon the hill. He had died, it had seemed, willingly, as though he had lost patience with life. Louisa had grieved, but there had been a certain peace in her husband's last days that had consoled her. Herself on the downward slope of her existence, death seemed to her but a separation rendered the shorter by the fact of her own age, and if one died with a voluntary spirit surely it were foolish to sorrow too bitterly. She was lonely, but George stayed much with her, and Walt and Jeff, though their company was less to be depended upon, comforted her by the solid affection of their natures. The death of his father had for a day greatly moved Walt, but his book, a living force, absorbed his consciousness. His mother's and his brothers' casual acceptance of its publication secretly astonished him. When he showed them Emerson's letter they congratulated him but, incredibly enough, they were not greatly impressed. It was extraordinary, he thought. George did not even read the book and Louisa, after a bewildered hour of study, had taken him aside and hazarded the remark that of late she

had read Mr. Longfellow's "Hiawatha," a muddling, turgid lot of writing, and that "Leaves of Grass" seemed to her to be much the same sort of thing. George had pondered. Mr. Longfellow was, admittedly, a poet. Perhaps if "Hiawatha" were poetry so was "Leaves of Grass." The thought cheered them but it did not impel them to read further. In the Whitman household the book reposed in an obscurity unredeemed even by disapproval.

And it did not sell. This, most of all, depressed Walt, but it left his confidence utterly unshaken. A year later, in June, 1856, he had completed his second edition, a larger volume containing twenty new poems and bearing emblazoned upon the backstrap Emerson's phrase of compliment. When this volume reached Concord and the Sage observed the gilt letters, he quivered.

"I greet you at the beginning of a great career. R. W. Emerson."

The thing was monstrous. A sentence wrenched from its context in a personal letter and hurled thus in the public's face. What sort of man was it that could do such a thing? An appendix was entitled

"Leaves-Droppings," and besides press notices and Emerson's letter, possessed Walt's reply. This reply was a fearful and wonderful thing. Walt had written it when still exhilarated by the great man's praise, nervously depressed by attacking critics, and subconsciously discouraged by the book's failure to sell. Indeed, he had written it when he was no more himself than Emerson, but a curiously deficient sense of delicacy and good taste forbade his destroying it later when he had become once more composed. Emerson read it, and shuddered. He read it again. It was incredible. Walt had blandly stated that the first edition, a thousand copies, had readily sold. Well, that was possible.

"I much enjoy making poems. Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and the States face to face, to confront them with an American-made tongue; but the work of my life is making poems. I keep on till I make a hundred, and then several hundred—perhaps a thousand. The way is clear to me. A few years, and the average annual call for my poems is ten or twenty thousand copies—more, quite likely. Why should I hurry or compromise? In poems or in speeches I say the word or

two that has got to be said, adhere to the body, step with the countless common footsteps, and remind every man or woman of something.

"Master, I am a man who has perfect faith. Master, we have not come through centuries, caste, heroisms, fables, to halt in this land to-day."

There was more, but this was enough to startle Mr. Emerson so unpleasantly as almost to convince him that "Leaves of Grass" was after all of rather doubtful merit. Making poems, forsooth! Nevertheless, he had sent the book to Carlyle, though with the appended permission to use it as tinder wherewith to light his pipe should the redoubtable Scotsman think nothing of it.

But Walt in Brooklyn was commencing to enjoy a certain small fame. People of note came to see him and talked with him, in tones somewhat deferential, of literature and its creation. Thoreau sought him out at the establishment of the brothers Rome and, finding him correcting proof, stayed for some time and went away delighted. "He is a great fellow," he wrote his friend Harrison Blake, and "he is awfully good."

A. Bronson Alcott, the Transcendentalist and a

friend of Emerson, came, William Cullen Bryant, and finally Emerson himself. He had been at first hesitant but when he saw Walt he forgot the unfortunate impression that the second edition had made upon him. The man was as much a force of nature as the gale or the drive of autumnal rain. In 1860 Walt was ready to publish once more, and in Boston he found publishers who were glad to take his work. C. W. Eldridge, of Thayer & Eldridge, was, in particular, a most sympathetic friend, a man of taste and perception in literature who espoused Walt's cause with vehement devotion. But W. D. O'Connor, a friend of Eldridge, engaged at the time in writing a novel for that publisher, was to prove an even more valuable ally. O'Connor, a brilliant, temperamental Celt whose command of prose was as vivid as his personality, became immediately convinced that in Walt the United States was as a whole ignoring the greatest genius of the age. He invited Walt to share his hospitality at any time for as long as he desired, and indeed the O'Connors did much to render his sojourn in Boston pleasant and comfortable. One day Emerson, who had been much to see him, took Walt for a long walk upon the Boston Common

and argued with him to excise from his work certain passages such as those that had caused the beloved and revered Mr. Whittier to hurl his copy of "Leaves of Grass" into his fire. Each point, each statement, that Emerson made was, Walt admitted, unanswerable and yet the Dutch stubbornness in his character held him to his intention to destroy nothing of what he had conceived and written. When Emerson asked what he had to say in rebuttal, Walt frankly admitted that he had nothing to say but that he was determined not to follow his friend's advice. Emerson threw up his hands and the two went to the American House, where they ordered and consumed a tremendous and delicious dinner. They went together to hear Father Taylor, the sailor preacher, and admitted that not the eloquence of Webster or his famous colleagues could surpass him. They walked and talked—or rather Emerson talked—and Walt listened, looming above his illustrious companion, his big hands clasped behind his back, his face, with its increasingly noble expression, meditative and serene. He returned to New York in June, 1860, no longer an obscure journalist and political editorial writer, the imitator of authors of accredited ability, and the hack

writer of a score of journals, but a poet whose individuality and talent were fast being recognized by a name far greater. Such friends as O'Connor and Eldridge were the first disciples of a band and they cried Genius! without stinting the length or the volume of their shouting. Walt himself felt not the least surprise at this eventual emergence from the obscurity that he had experienced for almost a decade before the publication of his book. Tolerably well-known in New York in 1844, ten years later he was virtually forgotten, and new names stood upon the contents pages of the periodicals for which he had written so busily. But he had never at any time doubted that the apple of his fame was but ripening upon the bough and he had waited quite calmly to eat it.

Back in Brooklyn, the Romes told their customers that whatever people in general thought of Mr. Whitman's poetry, the big guns in his profession seemed to swear by it. Mr. Bryant, an old man whose reputation was so great that his appearance in Fulton Street caused a genuine sensation, came often to see Walt, crossing on the ferry and causing the Romes unlimited pride by his presence in their rooms.

Mr. Bryant, editor of the *Evening Post*, was a judge of such work as Mr. Whitman went in for, and if he judged it good enough to come all the way to Brooklyn to talk about, then there were a lot of people in Brooklyn who could afford to talk less about its worthlessness. Thus at home Walt became a figure of prominence while his old colleagues on the journals sat and wondered at the change in him. There was a benignity about him. Why? In his editorial days he had never betrayed anything more remarkable than a solid ability to use a moderately wide vocabulary and a good imagination. His poetry had been good enough, at a pinch perhaps very good, but nothing, certainly, that might be considered indicative of the work displayed in "Leaves of Grass." And whence the prophetic air? Walt, many of them observed, took himself awfully seriously. Louisa continued to see nothing extraordinary in his sudden recognition as an individual if not necessarily as a great poet. With much the same placid confidence that he himself possessed, she had, she believed, always known that Walt was going to be a great man in some way or other. Mother and son held each other in perfect sympathy though, strangely

enough, her understanding of him remained imperfect.

Never before in his life had Walt worked so hard. Though he arose late, ate frugally at odd times, and apparently loafed with his usual abandon, he was in reality composing an astonishing number of poems and doing so with infinite care, solicitous of every shade of meaning and every mark of punctuation. He was, as he had written Emerson, making poems, though occasionally for a week or more even this self-imposed discipline of labour grew distasteful and the pure idler reasserted itself in him. At such times he appeared without loss of time on Broadway, smiling, expansive, genial, less the prophet than the jocund wine companion.

CHAPTER XV

AT PFAFF'S on Broadway near Bleecker Street Pfaff himself, German, of a somewhat heavy habit of body, jolly but not talkative, greeted his guests at the door and ushered them into his restaurant as into his own parlour. The place was heavy with odours, all of them succulent, and those who dined there once dined there always though the fare induced the globular appearance in themselves that characterized their host. Below the street and beneath the sidewalks were the cellars, cellars that contained the best champagnes in New York, for Pfaff was a famous amateur of wines. There were Burgundies, white and red, Graves and Haut-Graves, Clos Regent and Bommes-Sauternes, Beaune and Volnay, Bonnes-Mares and Romanée, wines as irresistibly charming to the palate as their names are to the mind. Pfaff himself, if you were one of the initiated few who used his cellars as Johnson and the club used the Mitre, would show you bottles, cob-webbed and dusty, that preserved vintages that were old when your

father was a young buck reading the news of Waterloo or of the election by the House of Representatives of John Quincy Adams though Old Hickory, one supposed, had won the campaign. Did you fancy Sherries? Pfaff showed you an Isabel of 1830; Madeiras? a Malvoisie Royal from the Great Reserve of 1837, Cama de Lobos de Joa Vicente de Silva, bottled a decade ago and caressing as the hand of a beautiful woman. There was no wine crushed from grapes that the cellars of Herr Pfaff did not contain, dusty and cool and precious. Here beneath the sidewalk, where above your head you might hear the citizens of New York going about their business, hot, maybe, and very likely thirsty, ignorant of the liquid treasures beneath their boot soles, there was a table at which daily the minor wits of the city, and some of the major ones, sat and drank and blew tobacco in blue puffs and spirals into the air and arranged the destinies of nations and of individuals with an infinite satisfaction and gusto. To-day, perhaps, with the traffic of late afternoon moving homeward overhead there is FitzJames O'Brien, author of "The Diamond Lens," "The Lost Room," and "The Wonder Smith," a writer of mystery stories, Irish, with a brilliant

mind and dark, scarred face, whose expensive tastes and irregular periods of opulence he finds hard to coördinate. He has written a play for Mr. Wallack, "A Gentleman from Ireland," and he anticipates prosperity with an old red Burgundy that he holds just beneath his nose with an expression of tender beatitude. There is Henry Clapp, a young newspaper man, with a journal of his own, whose ideas grow proportionately more shining with the recession of the dark tide in the bottle before him, and John Swinton of the *Times*, forceful with an edged tongue and trenchant habit of debate. Here, two places away from Clapp, may sit William Dean Howells, a young man of twenty-three, who is interested in letters, and between these two lounges one who looks years older than any of them, gray-headed and gray-bearded, a giant with the face of a benignant Moses, straight-featured, with the complexion of an athlete. This would be Walt Whitman, one-time journalist and until very recently the editor of the Brooklyn *Times*, a connection made in 1857 and terminated in '59, barely two years ago. But he is, above these things, the author of "Leaves of Grass." He is probably the most abused and the most fiercely

championed poet in the world to-day and certainly in America. Clapp breaks a spear in his defence daily. So does Swinton. Walt sits at Pfaff's almost every day, listening to the discussions that pass across the table like sword-play, talking little himself save when he murmurs, ecstatically, "Go it!" as Swinton gets into action, the smoke that hangs like a veil above the table like that of battle.

He comes up in the late afternoon from the Old New York Hospital on Broadway facing Pearl, where he helps to nurse sick or disabled stage-drivers, old friends of his who bawl after him as he goes: "Come to-morrow, Walt," or "Stay sober, Walt," and who miss him and swear at him and love him. Late in the evening, the wine pleasantly warm in his blood, he goes down to the ferry and crosses to Brooklyn, where he lives with his mother, working at his poems, sleeping, sauntering, idling. He gets up late and after lunch he goes to the hospital or rides up and down Broadway as he has been doing for years with the drivers who are sound and well. He usually sits with them, and talk passes continuously between them with sudden interjections of loud laughter or a curse uttered in a spirit of wonderment. That is

when Walt has rendered a line or two of Hamlet or Richard III or Macbeth. The drivers have known him for years. He is a celebrity now, in a small way. His stature, his beard, his soft hat with its generous brim, all the details of his appearance, are becoming familiar to New Yorkers. It does not matter if the lady in crinoline on the arm of the tall gentleman with the moustaches and the little tuft on the lower lip, in the fashion of the Emperor of the French, shudders decorously and whispers to her companion, "Look, that's Walt Whitman. The man, you know, who wrote that terrible book." Or if the tall gentleman frowns and says things about men who write indecencies. There are lots of other couples who smile when they see him and bid him good-day as if he were the oldest friend of the family.

Walt in 1861 is a personality. He is the friend of famous men and of omnibus-drivers, ferry pilots, and a number of young fellows, some of them talented, who consider him only a little less admirable a figure in the history of the world than Christ. He is also the friend of several persons at one time or another suspected of theft, and he does not cut a young woman of a certain broken beauty whom he once

encountered plying her weary trade on Canal Street and on whose problem he had composed from his editorial office on the Brooklyn *Times* on June 20, 1857, an editorial of grave warning. "I dare not refuse you," he had said in one of those poems of his, and indeed he refuses no one.

On the 13th of April, 1861, he strolled at a little after five down Broadway to Bleecker Street. He was thirsty and the thought of the beer in Pfaff's cellarage occupied his mind pleasantly with anticipation. The busy thoroughfare, golden in the sun that was sliding down behind the western buildings, was as usual colourful and loud, the 'buses clattering, the newsboys yelling their editions, and the clerks, after-office-hour cigars at abrupt angles, were going home not too fast and wondering audibly if they had time for just one at the corner. Walt was happy. His Boston publishers were sanguine about his new book, he had a letter from his brother Jeff in his pocket, and though he was in his forty-second year he felt as young as a sixteen-year-old and as strong as a buffalo. Things were, he thought with a feeling of security, coming his way now with a vengeance. What if the bulk of his countrymen continued to consider him a

writer of dirty poems and not improbably a menace to public morals? He had a growing legion of friends who admired him and his work and who fought in a solid little phalanx for his recognition. Few men could boast of Emerson's friendship, of intimate relations with Thoreau, or Bryant or Bronson Alcott. The time was coming when his country and the world would accept his poems as prophecies and great truths, and his own faith that they were these things reduced the attacks of the unenlightened to innocuous vapourings. He observed John Swinton just ahead of him, headed apparently for the same destination. He called. Swinton, on his strongly marked features an expression of deep thought, turned.

"Hello, Walt. Well, here's hell to pay."

Walt was astonished. "What's up, John?"

"War is up, that's what's up. The guns down in Charleston manned by those Southern fire-eaters have fired on Sumter."

Walt, incredulous, halted. "Who told you that?"

"Never mind, but the late editions on the street to-night will have it all. War, bloody war. It's been coming for twenty years."

"Maybe it's just a rumour, John. You know how

those stories get started. Two years ago it was John Brown."

They passed into Pfaff's. Walt, startled, became more cheerful as he repeated to himself the opinion that it was, after all, only a rumour. John was wrong to take a floating story and hang on to it for the truth. In the cellars beneath the sidewalk the familiar circle was gathered, and to his relief the talk, loud and incessant, was reassuringly barren of any mention of Sumter or Southern fire-eaters. Swinton, however, remained silent, ordered a bottle of claret and brooded over it, ignoring the occasional sallies that were cast in his direction in an attempt to draw him into a debate. His attitude depressed Walt and made his beer taste something flat to him. O'Brien was smoking a cigar that smelt like the drying seaweed on the beaches near Montauk that Walt had discovered when a boy. It was no cigar to smoke in a cellar, and in Walt's private opinion it was no cigar to smoke anywhere at all. He finished his beer and went upstairs, followed by Henry Clapp, with whom he was attending the opera being sung at Fourteenth Street that evening. Pfaff himself served them dinner and Clapp talked with a friendly garrulity now to

Walt and now to the big Saxon girl whose capable hands wrought peerless *küchen*. But Walt could not shake off the mood into which Swinton's sombre prediction had flung him. Damn the man, anyway. Suppose his story proved to be the truth, after all. Broadway, as the friends strolled north after supper, seemed to Walt quieter than usual. It was still not entirely dark and already the early spring walked softly in the air making great-coats superfluous and the night rather exciting, promising of romances and of pretty faces less often sternly averted from admiring, speculative, masculine glances. Clapp, oblivious of Walt's unwonted gloom, managed to snare one or two smiles. "Look, Walt, ain't she a beauty? Why, she smiled right at you." But Walt was granite.

The opera was tolerably sung, and for the two hours Walt sat entranced, his legs crossed, his hat on his knee and his chin in its gray forest sunk upon his chest. He thought of all the voices that he had revelled in, Grisi's, Alboni's, Lind's, Mario's, and Badiali's, and they blent into one great strain of melody that lifted his thoughts away from war and unquiet things and pain.

Afterward the two friends separated, Clapp going north and Walt again down Broadway to the ferry. The night seemed full of little cries, sharp fracturings of the general silence, the cessation of sound that fell upon New York at midnight. Walt hearkened. Shrill, imperative, they were growing louder. Opposite Niblo's Hotel he saw the cause. A small squadron of newsboys appeared down the street, darting from sidewalk to sidewalk like swallows, dark little figures waving pale flags, and screaming their extras with shrill punctuated violence. In the lighted doorway of Niblo's men stood and watched them. Walt checked one in zigzag flight and bought a paper, crossing the street and entering the hotel lobby with it. In the tobacco-heavy air there was a restrained feeling of tension. Walt opened the paper and the men about him waited expectantly. Swinton had spread no rumour. His tale of war awakening had been the truth. "Gentlemen, Southerners have fired on the flag in Charleston Harbour."

Other papers appeared in the crowd. The great lamps blazed, the brass spittoons gleamed, the papers rustled. There was absolute silence. Without warning voices were recovered in cacophonous vehemence.

A big man, his high hat on the back of his head and his stick tucked under his arm, shook his paper into a comfortably readable flatness and read aloud the telegram to an audience now forty strong. Another silence followed the last cadence. Someone exclaimed profanely. Feet were scraped and a man with scared eyes shouted suddenly and cryptically: "The God-damned fools!" Walt went away. The night was still filled with the sand-peep announcements of the newsboys, but on the ferry there was no sound save that of heavy timber creaking to the jarring drive of power and the liquid whispering of cloven water.

The next morning George announced his intention of enlisting, and the evening found him with a group of similarly-aged young men decided to join the 51st New York Volunteers, a regiment made up largely of Brooklyn men. The spring melted away into summer and July brought the first battle of Bull Run and the departure of George for Washington. The 51st entrained amid cheers, and Walt and Louisa saw them board and disappear to the metallic strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" produced by a citizens' band that became suddenly silent when the train had gone, leaving in the hot, breathless air an at-

mosphere of disillusion and depressing anticlimax. Bull Run itself had dealt the Union morale a shrewd blow, and the parents of the Brooklyn volunteers wondered, some of them, if the South had not after all a certain justice upon its side. There was talk in Washington of the advisability of Lincoln's departure, uttered by weak spirits who had seen the broken blue ranks pouring into the city over the Long Bridge in the dawn of the 22d of July. Walt went once or twice to Pfaff's, but the conversation in the cellars languished and there were gaps among the wits. FitzJames O'Brien had enlisted in the Seventh Regiment of New York, and there were others who had shown less creditable energy and who did not care to face the silent inquiry that met their unaccoutred forms in public places. The house of Thayer & Eldridge sent bad news. The war was pressing them and they had not been able to collect their bills. They regretted the necessity of having to withdraw from further publication "Leaves of Grass," as the means wherewith to continue the project were unavailable. Walt took the disappointment stoically but the wound went deep. It had seemed as if at last he were about to reap the

yield of his sowing after waiting for more than half a decade, but once again his poems had returned to him. In February, 1862, pausing for a few minutes at Pfaff's, the round German, now more silent than ever, told him as he drew the beer that O'Brien after a gallant record and notable advancement had died of wounds received in a purposeless skirmish. The restaurant, once so filled with the sound of silver upon china, the ring of steins and delicately stemmed glasses upon the tabletops, and continual conversation, was almost empty and the diners ate sombrely, reading from newspapers by their plates. Pfaff himself was saddened. The sight of Walt cheered him and he wished to open a bottle of wine but Walt would not stay. The summer dragged though Shiloh and the surrender of Fort Donelson, Farragut's successful action before New Orleans, Malvern, and Antietam restored the faith of the non-combatants in the North in the abilities of the Union armies.

Walt had no thought of enlisting. In the composition of his character, despite the physical strength of his body, there was much that was more typical of the woman than of the man. Unlike that of George, his courage, an undoubted quality, did not

impel him to active service, but the long months of inaction and anxiety began to wear on his nerves and level little blows at his self-respect. In December, Burnside led the Union troops across the Rappahannock to be butchered in the icy waters by Lee's marksmen, and from the shambles of Fredericksburg came the news that George had been badly wounded. Walt's problem was solved. He set off at once to nurse his brother, and in the big brick house by the river in Virginia that had checked the Federal forces a week before, Walt found his avocation. George's wound had not, after all, proved serious, and on Walt's arrival, his younger brother, already a commissioned officer, was again on his feet. To George the killing of battle was a thing little to be feared, but the aftermath of stench and mangled corruption made formidable attacks upon his composure. Here lay the difference between the brothers. The slaughter of men filled Walt with agony, but the ministering to the bloody shards of humanity that still breathed he performed without repulsion and with a certain tender gratitude. In his mind the service that he was to render his country became clearly defined. January found him still in the South, a dresser of wounds.

CHAPTER XVI

IN JANUARY, 1863, Walt left the hospital opposite Fredericksburg and returned to Washington, travelling with some wounded up the Potomac and along roads at the ragged sides of which guards, faded of uniform and rusty of equipment, appeared to countersign their passage. Walt, his pockets packed with candies and sweet biscuits hard-won from commissariats and clement grocers in tiny, silent villages, walked among the hurt, distributing his battered little presents with jokes and sanguine prophecies, straightening bandages and sitting by bad cases, holding the dry, hot hands and cheerful always. One boy, barely twenty, who had enlisted from a hamlet in northern Massachusetts to be shot through the stomach on the day of Burnside's mad spanning of the Rappahannock, died with Walt's arm beneath his head, confident that it was sleep that was checking the battered agony in his body, lulled by the tender voice that murmured by his ear:

"There, son, steady, old boy, steady. All right,

now, son. You're all right now. Easy, son, easy, my dear."

Washington, converted into a camp and a vast hospital ward, possessed much work to do for Walt. The Patent-Office, the Eighth Street, the H Street, and the Armoury Square hospitals were filled with the smashed bones and shredded muscles of young men who had become the pawns of Death upon a board squared black and red for the privilege of firing upon the Stars-and-Bars that seemed never to jerk backward above the gray ranks of Lee. In the long wards that smelt evilly of unsound flesh and gangrenous infection, of antiseptics that fought the stench of human dirt, Walt spent days and parts of nights, writing to mothers and fathers of their children's cases, their recoveries or their deaths. Suffering, the men were as children, and the big man in his gray worn clothes and heavy beard grown now almost white revived for them the joyous myth of Santa Claus as he walked between the beds, leaving upon soiled and rumpled counterpanes frayed little packages of sweets or a longed-for envelope, ready stamped and addressed, for its cramped and uneven scrawl. He sat by men and talked of harvest times, of autum-

nal evenings fragrant with the pungent delight of the smoke from burning leaves, of shocked corn black against the sky, and barn dances where girls and cider seemed both of them so sweet. He seemed to know the wide country-sides of America from the Rocky Mountains to the New England Coast and how each one of them responded to the changing tempers of the seasons. With a boy from Indiana lying without legs, his mind a rubbed-out drawing of life before the war, Walt talked intimately of the childish anticipation that fills the mind the day before Christmas, of the bustle and portentous secrecies, of the magnificent odour that charged forth from the kitchen, of the fires within and the snow that was crusting brilliantly without, the maimed man's mind and his in that superb accord that characterizes the talk of friendly little children.

"And Pap always made a joke about his supposing that all that was going to be left for him was the Pope's nose and him not a church man. And Mother was like to say, 'Well, Father, if you'd a-had been, I'd a-never married you. I hear the Reverend Tweak nigh starves Mrs. Tweak.'"

Indiana would spread its fields just outside the

ward where the boy could almost smell it, and the reek in his nostrils that had been there since he found himself in the mud with his legs and his uniform trousers the same dark smear would be forgotten. There never passed a day when Walt's ministrations flagged or were relaxed, for every day brought yet more men to the choked backwater of the hospitals. Chancellorsville in May shook the Union morale almost as heavily as had Bull Run two years before. Hooker, called fondly "Fighting Joe," with an army almost twice the strength of Lee's, had been thrashed to a pulp and his reserves outgeneralled and outfought and terribly crippled. Washington received the remnants sombrely. Meade replaced Hooker as Hooker had replaced Burnside, and men consoled themselves as they could with the thought that "Stonewall" Jackson, at least, would win no more victories. After Chancellorsville, events moved like the cannon that attended them, thunderously. Lee crossed the Potomac and, with Meade parrying his thrust into Pennsylvania, his army falling back with masterly cohesion, prepared to crush the Union at Gettysburg. On July 2d, Longstreet, stubborn and self-confident, delayed his attack at Little Round

Top and finally was repulsed by Sickles and the panting reinforcements of Sedgwick. Elwell swept Culp's Hill to lose it on the morrow, and Lee's last stroke was heralded by the cannonading of two hundred guns. Pickett, like Ney at Waterloo, leader of the first of these two most remarkable charges in modern military history, led his own men, a veteran division of 13,000 which carried with it toward Hancock's rifles the last brave hopes of the South. The gray waves, even before the roar of the enfilading musketry of Stannard's Vermont Brigade, trembled only slightly, but over the stone wall and up the hill they could not sweep. On Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington next day the weather was warm and the sun shone. There had been rain the night before and it had laid the dust. As Walt passed the bulletin board of a daily paper he saw the news: "Glorious Victory for the Union Army."

Meade, he read, had beaten Lee and taken three thousand prisoners. Jubilance ran down the Avenue in swift filaments of communication, and Walt, with a sudden holiday feeling, purchased upon his way to the Armoury hospital bottles of blackberry and cherry syrups. He went through the wards telling the news

of the victory and mixing his syrups in ice-water and serving them himself to the men in the cots. His drinks were received with more enthusiasm than his tidings, for the men had lost their contacts with martial enthusiasm and the lustre of success. There was a faint cheer, a little fire that ran down the lines of beds, catching now and then a more vigorous impulse at the pillow of a convalescent, but it died soon. Some of the wounded listened, their faces expressionless, utterly uninterested. The war had done with them and they were so tired that their conviction that, too, it had done for them, stirred in their bony breasts no shadow of resentment. They sipped their drinks, holding by one hand to Walt's wrist, and muttering with gratefully humid lips: "Thanks, Walt. Walt, you're a jim-dandy."

Some of the younger men, looking with bewildered eyes upon a world that seemed barren of affection and a kindness not frigidly impersonal, clung to him in the half-feverish hope that he might suddenly become transformed and, by some miracle of wishing, turn out to be, not Walt the kind old sport, but their mothers or the fathers that had always cared for and protected them. These, Walt, when he left them,

always kissed as tenderly as though they had been of his own blood. That womanliness in his nature that had forced upon his consciousness an abhorrence of slaying made of his nursing a miracle of solicitude, and of his relations with men for whom he felt affection, communion as unselfconscious and as frank in its expression as though he were a child. To the racked children in the cots his kisses were not strange. Without friends and in an alien city of which they knew nothing save that since they had come to it they had suffered agonies beyond reason, they drank in Walt's gentleness and affection with a gratitude mixed with the unreasoning belief that their families must somehow have sent a substitute.

The money with which Walt bought his little presents and gave his treats was sent to him by his friends in New York and Boston to whom he wrote, describing what he sought to do and what already he had done. Emerson and Wendell Phillips and others contributed, and in February, 1863, when, aided by John Hay, twenty-five, private secretary to the President and an admirer of "Leaves of Grass," Walt had returned to Brooklyn for a month, his own narratives of the hospitals gained many offerings. In

Brooklyn, Louisa, to use Walt's own words, was "sailing on amid my troubles and discouragements like a noble old ship." Andrew Whitman, his younger brother, christened Andrew Jackson for his father's abiding hero, after a lifetime short and unproductive of felicity, was dying of an illness which neither the genial old family doctor nor Louisa could check. Walt, after perceiving with astonishment that Brooklyn and New York had been superseded in his affections by Washington, returned there to find shortly after his arrival a letter informing him of his brother's death. His first impulse was one of overwhelming love and devotion to Louisa. How wonderfully she was ageing, as though by a process of searing trials that were leaving her only the nobler for them and the integrity of her life the more enduring. But the thought of her, almost alone in the large house, with Jeff married and George fighting, with Andrew dead and Jesse gone God knew where and his sisters busy and often absent, filled him with homesickness and a longing to be with her. But in Washington the hospitals held him, and the dark monochrome of his life was more pleasant to him than had been the more blithe existence of the Northern cities. He was less

in sympathy now with the urban scheme of days spent lightly with no counting of the wealth that still remained.

"The life here in the cities, and the objects, etc., of most, seem to me very flippant and shallow since I returned this time," he wrote from Brooklyn to his friend, Charles W. Eldridge, the Boston publisher. He spoke, too, of a new book of poems upon which he had been at work, "Drum Taps," in which he had embodied impressions of the war in verse as satisfying to him as any that he had written. Upon his arrival in the Capital from the hospital upon the Rappahannock, his friend W. D. O'Connor and his wife had urged Walt to accept their hospitality, but after a few months they had taken another house and Walt, his every nerve concentrated upon his nursing, eating little and sleeping little, had moved into a garret in a tenement at 456 Sixth Street. Major Hapgood, an army paymaster, had upon the recommendation of Eldridge given Walt a desk in his office, and there for two or three hours a day he earned a few dollars copying documents, departing, when his work was finished, to buy with his little wages fruit and cheap blank-books and pencils for his innumer-

able wounded. The news came from Brooklyn that Jeff, now the supporter of the mother, and the father of a family, was likely to be pressed into service. Walt worried more about Louisa, and now and again the thought of his manuscripts at home, untended and perhaps mislaid, depressed him terribly.

"Mother, when you or Jeff write again tell me if my papers and MSS. are all right; I should be very sorry indeed if they got scattered or used up or anything—especially the copy of 'Leaves of Grass' covered in blue paper, and the little MS. book 'Drum Taps,' and the MS. tied up in the square, spotted loose covers. I want them all carefully kept."

He had secured letters of introduction to Chase, the great Secretary of the Treasury, and to Sumner the Senator from Massachusetts, but he delayed in presenting them. A guest of the great Secretary's, J. T. Trowbridge, having observed Walt upon the streets, insisted on Walt's making use of his letter to Chase, the more so since it was from Emerson. Trowbridge spoke of the matter one night over the wine, and the Secretary of the Treasury, an anecdote upon his lips, observed that could he see Mr. Emer-

son's recommendation, something might be done for Whitman. Trowbridge, delighted, secured the letter and stood by as Chase read it, confident that he had been instrumental in doing Walt a service. Mr. Chase, however, while deeply interested in the handwriting and the signature, seemed hesitant about the contents.

"Smoke, Mr. Trowbridge?" Trowbridge refused a cigar.

"Well, Mr. Trowbridge, you know this fellow has written a notorious book. A very notorious book."

"Ah, but if Emerson recommends him, the man must be worth something, Mr. Chase."

"Why, yes. Yes, of course that's true, Mr. Trowbridge, but what a man like Emerson can swallow is a larger bit by a long shot than what our friend the public can."

"But the public won't know if you appoint him to some small office, some minor occupation that may keep him from starving, Mr. Chase. The man is doing wonders for our wounded, wonders, and I, personally, know that he lives in extremely reduced circumstances."

"Well, Mr. Trowbridge, I am afraid—yes, I am

afraid that my conscience will not allow me to appoint a man to public office who has written a notorious book."

Trowbridge remained aghast. His mouth open, he stared at the Secretary of the Treasury as though from the latter's mouth he had suddenly seen flames emerge. Somewhat testily Mr. Chase folded the letter, but as he was about to return it to Trowbridge he paused. Upon his massive, powerful face a pleased expression banished the irritation.

"You know, Mr. Trowbridge, as this letter is to me I think I'll just keep it. I won't destroy it. I don't know why I started to hand it back. I don't suppose Whitman wants it for any other purpose. But, you see, I do. I want Emerson's autograph. There's a great man, Mr. Trowbridge, a great soul and a great mind."

He was smiling. He had, Trowbridge perceived, forgotten Walt's existence. With dignity and cold formality Trowbridge left the Secretary's mansion. So Walt received no benefit from the one introduction that had promised bravely. O'Connor wrote also to Chase, and Walt sent him a volume, which was acknowledged, yet still nothing came of it. The

truth was that Mr. Chase shortly after his conversation with Mr. Trowbridge had paid a visit to a lady in Washington for whom he entertained a certain gallant admiration. He had read a few poems in "Leaves of Grass" and was reasonably confident that the book was pornography, and though passably amusing, not in any way to be commended or mentioned in the presence of ladies. Therefore when he beheld the fat edition of 1856 reposing upon the drawing-room table as he waited for his friend to descend, he was filled with astonishment that shortly turned to extreme irritation. The lady appeared, gracious and becomingly deferential. After greetings the stern formality of which somewhat bewildered the hostess, the Secretary of the Treasury, an expression of awful severity upon his face, lifted his great hand, disclosing beneath it the fruit of Walt's genius.

"Madam," said Mr. Chase, a superb reverberation stirring slightly the pendent brilliants of the chandelier, "Madam, what is this doing here?"

The lady, one of those who, having sustained the initial shock of Walt's outpourings, had become a passionate disciple, became suddenly filled with cold, courageous fury.

"Sir," her voice attacked slenderly, like a bodkin. "Sir, for that matter, what are you doing here?"

Salmon P. Chase had not, in late years, experienced defiance. He spoke for some minutes, and his giant presence had never seemed so imposing nor so dreadful, but the late Senator from Ohio had lost something of the flexibility of small-sword debate. His sabre was a useless encumbrance before the needle-like stabs of the defender of Walt's work.

His carriage rolled homeward a brief half hour after his coachman had drawn up before that lady's house. Walt Whitman was a subject that in all justice he thereafter considered injurious to his liver and thereby to his peace of mind. He had been, his coachman recalled, in a notable fury as he emerged from his hostess's front door.

CHAPTER XVII

HOWEVER, his lack of official occupation troubled Walt but little, save that it prevented him from taking to the hospitals with him as many little offerings as he would have wished. Contributions from the North allowed him never to arrive in the wards empty-handed, but his small means he was forced to dispose of for his own needs though these were astonishingly meagre. In his garret, a bare room carpeted with random papers and bits of writing, he breakfasted for a few cents and slept not without discomfort. His other meals he took when he could, and though his appetite retained its ancient hearty dimensions, he seldom entirely satisfied it. His routine went on undisturbed though his letters had gained him nothing. The fact that Mr. Chase considered his book so notorious as to furnish an impediment to his being employed by the Government lowered his opinion of the great Secretary but left him otherwise unimpressed. Walking to and fro between the hospitals he had several times encoun-

tered the President, and the two men had come to bow cordially to each other. In Walt's opinion Mr. Lincoln was a man who, had he the time, would read "Leaves of Grass" and understand it. That was the difference between the calibres of the President and his Secretary of the Treasury. A big man in some ways, Chase, but in others of a rather small bore, decidedly. During the summer of '63 when the weather smote the inhabitants of Washington at midday as with a vast and steaming maul, Walt in the early morning would see the President riding to his work, a stiff top hat upon his head, clad in rusty black clothes, and his seat upon the big gray that he bestrode that of a ploughboy grown old, trotting out to the fields, a secure but undistinguished equestrian. At his side rode a young lieutenant of cavalry and behind him by twos trotted two dozen or so troopers, tanned, expressionless, posting to the swift trot, easily, their shoulders loose. Walt would halt and lift a hand in salute, marking the brown, lined face of Mr. Lincoln and the comprehending sadness of his eyes. He had a face, thought Walt, like a Hoosier Michael Angelo, so awfully ugly it became beautiful, with its strange mouth, its deep-cut,

criss-cross lines, and its doughnut complexion. The sabres clanked, the hoofbeats clattered in loud uneasy rhythm, and the cavalcade was by, leaving Walt ruminant upon the curb. The more he thought of Mr. Lincoln the more convinced he became that he was a great man, a great leader, a character to be loved and followed. As for the President, the sight of the gray-bearded giant, with his clear colour almost luminous beneath the broad-brimmed hat, abroad so early in the morning, ready with his salute and self-reliant gesture, pleased him and in some fashion made the street more cheerful. From the windows of the Executive Mansion, he had before observed Walt stop and exchange words and a great joyous laugh with the sentry on duty, and had asked who he was. He had been told. "Well," had said Mr. Lincoln, driving his hands into one another beneath his coattails, "*he* looks like a man."

In February, 1864, Walt decided that his experience of the war would be incomplete without a glimpse of active fighting. He left Washington and casually enough betook himself to Culpeper in Virginia, where he encountered the acrid atmosphere of engagements, the tenseness of prepared defence and

purposed attack, though he witnessed no battle nor yet skirmish. In Washington again here marked with satisfaction that Grant had been made commander-in-chief of the Union forces. To Walt the unbeatable combination of personalities in the North was composed of those of Lincoln and of the silent short man who nearly always forgot to light his cigars and before whom Vicksburg had proved but a flawed defence. The hospitals were as ever filled and the Wilderness campaign yielded its shattered thousands to the crowded wards. Walt went each day, sitting by his dying or scarcely-breathing boys and men, fanning them, talking to them, making their passing the easier or the long torment of convalescence the more bearable. "What is it, my dear?" and the parched tongues spoke, urgently, confidently, imparting some little news that Walt never allowed to escape his mind lest a mother be not notified of a son's fortune in death or upon the road that painfully led back to life. But the long hours in the close air thick with the poison of gangrenous flesh and wounds uncicatrized and long corrupt began to bear their cumulative yield. Walt, strong, as he had often said, as a buffalo, was a man of fresh

air and steady if unstrenuous exercise. The virus that lived in the packed wards, but scantily ventilated, set sudden siege to his health and brought him down. He arose one afternoon from the bedside of a boy who clung to him lest the miracle of his beneficent presence vanish into thin air, a short-lived dream—and tottered. An attendant paused.

"Anything wrong, Walt?"

"I feel kind of faint, Tom. Deathly faint. My head's been troubling me some lately."

He went home. Brooklyn and the clean air that washed into his window in the house on Portland Avenue seemed unutterably desirable and healing. In the middle of the night he awoke in his garret, his head feeling like a kettle with the water in it boiling but of an amount too small to make the process worth the while. A tinny clatter, a steaming discomfort, a buzzing in his ears. He was thirsty, and the memory of the well back of the old house in West Hills was a thing of torturing delight. The water had always been cool, so cool and so brownly clear and still in its dark shaft. The water in the chipped jug beside his bed was not the same. In a juggling tapestry he saw the cellars at Pfaff's and

the big steins, encrusted with coldly gleaming beads, the snowy foam rising slowly, marvellously light and bitter. He swallowed painfully and drank from his jug, the tepid water a drear actuality that did little to dispel his thirst. The next day he astounded a friendly doctor, who had come to look upon Walt as an indestructible physical mechanism, by requesting an examination. With practised fingers and casual questioning the man of medicine came to the conclusion that Walt had need of a rest and that at once. Smiling, yet with no hint of jocularity, he said so. Walt looked at him, his gray-blue eyes filled suddenly with infantine delight. "Go on, Doctor. A vacation?"

"Yes, sir. Right away, too. Why loiter?"

"I'll go home to Brooklyn."

"Why not?

Walt shook hands with him. He turned to go, then paused. "You know, Doctor, if I go, there are one or two boys I'd like you to keep an eye on for me. They'd miss me and they're bad cases, maybe hopeless. You tell them I'm just away for a little while, will be back soon, and lots of good things with me."

The doctor nodded. "Walt, you old cuss, you've got half the cases in Washington convinced that you're their fathers and mothers all rolled up into one with a Saint Nicholas beard stuck on for effect. Write me the names."

This was in June. Elated by the idea of a holiday, a swim off the beaches of Long Island, a stroll down Broadway and the cosy meals with his mother and possibly with Jeff and his little daughters, Walt decided to put off his departure that its consummation might seem the more wonderful through anticipation. In Washington the weather, as in the preceding summer, was an assault upon bearable existence. In the middle of the month, amassing the funds at hand, Walt appeared at the Carver Hospital laden with ice-cream. Enlisting the head surgeon and a squadron of nurses he cruised through the stifling wards, distributing the little mountains of softly modelled stuff, cautioning the men to eat it swiftly while it still held some degree of its firmness. There was huge enthusiasm. An unwonted gaiety was in the heavy air. Walt himself fed those whose arms were either bandaged tightly against their ribs or, lamentably, lacking altogether. "How's that, my dear?

How's that, eh? Ain't that the stuff?" and the dry lips of the eater, pleasantly daubed with white, would answer, "Say, that's bully. That's bully stuff, Walt," and gulp ecstatically.

June wore away and July brought to Walt the realization that if he wished to arrive in Brooklyn upon his own two feet and not upon a stretcher, he must be off. He had, in the torrid closing of June, assisted at an amputation of a limb rotten with gangrene from a soldier whose ragged regimentals, when he had been brought in, had been gray. Walt's hand, readjusting its hold upon the shoulder of the gasping follower of Jubal Early, had slipped, and the surgeon's knife, infected and poisonous, had gashed it. The arm had swollen rapidly, but the cut had healed as Walt had confidently predicted that it would, at once. "Hell," he had said, "a cut in the hand? Why, Doctor, I'm a bull for strength. I'm as sound as a nut." Somewhere within him a pioneering company of evil germs must have chuckled germily. The dizziness in his head increased, and to his extreme embarrassment he fainted one evening while dressing the wound of an Ohio boy who was averse to any one performing this duty save Walt. Reviving, he had assured the

patient that the operation in progress had had nothing to do with his collapse.

"No, no, my dear. But I've been seedy lately, seedy."

Next day he set out for Brooklyn, ostensibly for a fortnight's rest. He had met upon the street the doctor who had advised his departure, and the latter had made a great show of indignation.

"What the devil are you doing here, Walt? I thought I told you to go home a month ago."

"Now, Doctor, I'm going this week."

"See here, Walt, you need a nurse yourself. You can't take care of yourself. If you're not out of Washington by to-morrow, I'll detail a squad of internes to put you out." He had said more things, bouncing up and down in front of his huge listener like a fox-terrier. Walt had finally jammed his hat over his eyes and fled, leaving the Doctor shouting after him, "Off you go! off you go!"

Off he went, and in Brooklyn Louisa forgot her rheumatism in her anxiety and irritation at his arrogant disregard for his condition. The fortnight that he had intended to contain his leisure and repose passed and found him still abed, protesting but now

helpless beneath the firm and capable dominion of Louisa. He stayed in the North six months, the poisons in his system yielding stubbornly to fresh air and his mother's food and continued rest. He appeared again at Pfaff's and drank ale that Pfaff himself said was the soundest ale that, in a lifetime of moderate ale-drinking, he had ever drawn. The globular landlord fell upon his neck when he entered, a little whiter now than formerly, but the restored red-bronze of his face as clear as ever. The diners greeted him though only a few of them knew him save by name. "*Sollst Leben!*" "Here's how!" and the chill amber with its creamy collar sank many inches in the heavy steins.

"A new toast, that 'Here's how!'" observed the German.

"Here's how the Rebels ran," replied Walt. "Pretty damned new, when you think of it. Came in with Grant."

He became meditative. Grant's principles of war and the battles of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna, and Cold Harbour had proved terribly costly. Cold Harbour in especial had been hard for Grant's admirers to explain. Walt,

speaking, remarked a certain skepticism in the eye and pursed mouth of Herr Pfaff as he lifted his stein. "Oh, Grant's the man, all right. He's been licked but he's always back for more. He'll be in Richmond yet and in not such a long time, neither."

His host smiled. "Also *doch!* Here's hoping for here's how!"

The two men drank.

In Brooklyn Walt spent hours in fascinating conversation with one of Jeff's children, a tiny girl impulsively christened "California." California's point of view about life astonished and delighted Walt. In her opinion her father, now a civil engineer of rising reputation, stood at the head of a splendid hierarchy composed of such well-known men as Mr. Lincoln, General Grant, Uncle George, Grandmama Whitman, George Washington, Moses, and John James Healy, a young man who had once found her lost with her doll on Fulton Street and who had carried her home on his shoulder after magnificently treating her to ice-cream. She had explained the somewhat curious fact of her doll's apparent lack of a name and Mr. Healy had thoroughly understood her feelings, which in itself had been a test. California

had never definitely named her doll any one name, but she gave her half-a-dozen different ones a day, making them up as she went along according to her state of mind. For instance, Angelina, a beautiful name in itself, was absurd if rain had spoiled a picnic and her doll had remained stolidly unaffected by this tragedy. Ag was far more fitting. There was a monosyllabic roughness about Ag. It might be said shortly, with contempt or anger. It connoted a dull and stupid person. All of this Mr. Healy had agreed with, and indeed he had thought of three good names for the doll, each consonant with a mood. He was a clever man. California, after an examination of her uncle Walt's character and address, admitted him to her company of superior beings, but his place, as became that of one still, so to speak, passing through the novitiate period, was well below those of most of the others. But as time passed he went faster and faster to the top. The eminence possessed by her father was overshadowed by that of only one other person, a bearded young man of whom she had seen pictures and whose sayings her father and mother set much store by. It became shortly evident that Walt, too, was apt to share the

top rung with her father. Walt had much profit from his walks with California, whose homeward passage from these jaunts was made usually upon her uncle's shoulder, one small brown hand around his neck and the other waving with patronizing friendliness to contemporaries not similarly endowed with avuncular phenomena. Her observations about life and the curious things contained in it surprised Walt with their authentic accuracy of perception. It had for some years escaped his notice that cats were as a race discourteous and somewhat arrogant though charming and easily led when young, but that dogs both in youth and maturity and indeed even in old age were equably and genially disposed to little girls. He admitted, however, on reflection, that this was so. A change in the process of California's thought recalled to him the truth of the unwisdom and profitless folly of immoderation. California had had for many years a passion for maple sugar which until quite recently had never been completely satisfied. She had dreamt of maple sugar houses with maple sugar furniture, everything in them of maple sugar. She had imagined fearful but delightful debauches on maple sugar, but the realization of these dreams

had never taken place. But recently, she whispered, her tiny mouth hidden in her uncle's tickling beard, recently she had laid hands upon a whole box of maple sugar deposited in a large crock in the pantry at home. This she had eaten at a sitting, joyously at first but, as time went on, with a certain heaviness. Toward nightfall this heaviness had so materially increased as to necessitate a full confession to her mother, and the night had been hideous. The maple sugar had refused to remain in a state of quiescence and various horrid medicines had been administered. Over many of her experiences she drew a veil, but the moral was, as Walt easily perceived, that had she eaten with moderation she would still enjoy maple sugar. As it was, the thought of maple sugar appalled her. Walt was at once struck with her logic and her methods of diplomacy. He was now sure that she had seen him purchasing that sweet immediately before setting out for the afternoon, but her delicacy in the art of hinting filled him with admiration. Quietly he suggested that they stop by the ferry while he bought an evening paper. California equably pointed out that the counter at which he paused was a good counter, since over it were sold

not only journals but cigars and candy as well. The guile of both of them was terrible.

At home Walt was, for the six months of his rest-cure, completely happy. Louisa cooked the meals and the two of them sat long at table talking with complete sympathy about the war and politics and the greatness of Mr. Lincoln. His mother's intelligence always mildly surprised Walt, though he had always known that her mind, if untutored, was of great native capacity. A shrewd judge of men and events, she commented on the characteristics of the former and the significance of the latter with a perspicuity that was more to be depended upon than his own. Louisa saw through things. Walt saw through things, too, but he saw in a number of ways, obliquely, from above, from below. His vision was less pitilessly clear, and it amazed him that Louisa should be able to amplify his conclusions of the probable aftermath of the war with remarks that on reflection seemed to him bound to be justified. It puzzled him somewhat that her knowledge of human nature should be so extensive. But it delighted him. The two talked always on the same plane, Walt, as though to O'Connor or to Eldridge, confident of being under-

stood and of evoking interesting replies. Toward the end of January, 1865, the poison in his system seemed so far dissipated as to convince him that he must return to Washington. He longed to return again to his nursing, a desire which frequent visits to military hospitals in New York had whetted. In February, after promising California to carry certain messages from her to the President and to the commander-in-chief of all the armies of the Union, reassuring Louisa as to his strength, and drinking a farewell stein at Pfaff's, he returned to the Capital. Good luck seemed about to come once more his way. George, who for some time had been a prisoner of war though not under particularly worrying circumstances, was exchanged and news of his welfare revealed him the same hard-headed, silent, affectionate man as always. Like Grant, George seemed too much for the South to cope with. Then, too, Walt at last secured a government position, a desk under the Secretary of the Interior in the Indian Office, where he sat at ease at occupations that did not tax his strength and that allowed him much time with which to make his poems and prepare his new volume. "Drum Taps" seemed at last about to be published,

though Walt himself was paying the expenses of manufacturing it, and like its predecessor a decade before, it was to appear without the imprint of a publishing concern.

On March 4th Walt went to the inauguration of Lincoln upon his second term. With his admiration and affection in his eyes like flags of light, he saw the President drive down alone in his carriage to the Capitol at noon, his lined face sad and unsmiling, and at three return with no one in the two-horse barouche save his ten-year-old son, a company of civilians riding around the wheels. Walt attended the huge reception at the Executive Mansion, carried in and through the packed rooms in the crowd without the necessity of any conscious energy save that which was required to keep himself from being compressed to the jeopardy of his life. "I saw Mr. Lincoln," he wrote afterward, "drest all in black, with white kid gloves and a claw hammer coat, receiving, as in duty bound, shaking hands, looking very disconsolate, and as if he would give anything to be somewhere else." He never saw Mr. Lincoln again. Walt, securing leave from his department head, went north to Brooklyn to usher "Drum Taps" into the world,

and on the morning of April 15th, was sitting with Louisa at breakfast all unconscious that such a man as John Wilkes Booth even existed. He opened the *Eagle*, shaking it wide, and extended his right hand for his cup of coffee. Louisa looked up and started.

"Why, Walt, what's the matter?"

Her son, his face filled with a woe so personal and overwhelming that it frightened her, passed the paper across the table. Hesitantly, Louisa spelt out the headlines. Neither spoke, but in the hearts of both of them grief sprang and flourished like plants that in a mad luxuriance grow and bloom so swiftly that the two functions seem but one. The assassination of Mr. Lincoln was to both a personal bereavement and, to Louisa, an insult and a provocation to God. Walt went out from time to time and brought in extra editions and, as he wrote later, the mother and son passed the tragic news silently to each other, the tasks of the day being performed mechanically and without concentration. It was spring in Brooklyn, and along the dusty streets, but lately dried from the March rains, the lilacs in the gardens thrust their purple fragrance through white-washed fences into the faces of the passers-by. In Walt's consciousness

their clusters became indissolubly connected with the calamity that had befallen the nation. The impulse of creation, the need to express in poetry the sorrow that was filling him, drove him into his room, and there Louisa would find him in the days following the death of the President, his manuscript before him, his thoughts fluid and docile, covering the blank paper with his cursive script, revising, erasing, composing, but completing. "Drum Taps" was too far advanced in the process of birth for Walt to include in it these poems, though they came to be bound into unsold copies of that volume, but their conception arose from an event that for the rest of his life never lost for him its incision of impression. The end of the war, the cessation of the slaughter and the maiming of men, for a while were not brought home to him, so heavy a toll did it seem that the salvage of the Union had demanded. In his mind he saw constantly the tired face and the eyes with their expression of sad tolerance, that for twenty months had compelled his respect and his affection. He recalled the Lincoln of the day of inauguration and his own impressions, written afterward. He had "look'd very much worn and tired; the lines, indeed, of vast responsibilities,

intricate questions, and demands of life and death, cut deeper than ever upon his dark brown face; yet all the old goodness, tenderness, sadness, and canny shrewdness, underneath the furrows. (I never see that man without feeling that he is one to become personally attach'd to, for his combination of purest, heartiest tenderness, and native Western form of manliness.)"

Walt returned to his desk in the Indian Office, to his writing and to his visits to his boys, for the hospitals were not for some time emptied of their patients. He had in the last four years strenuously belied his reputation as an idler, but subtly he had become incomparably the more magnificent.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHN BURROUGHS, a young man of twenty-eight, held a clerkship in the United States Treasury. He had come to Washington in 1863 after having been a farm boy, a school teacher, a journalist, and the author of an essay on expression published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and widely attributed to Mr. Emerson. When this compliment had been paid him he was just twenty-three, and in the same year he had bought a copy of the 1860 edition of "Leaves of Grass," published by Thayer & Eldridge in Boston before the war forced them to return the book to Walt. Young Mr. Burroughs became, like O'Connor, a believer. He was out for an early morning stroll one day in the environs of Washington when he remarked a big man with a haversack on one shoulder sauntering along, his head bare and his gray beard drifting back from his colourful face like smoke in the light breeze. Mr. Burroughs recognized

Walt with great pleasure. He had seen him many times in Washington and the two never failed to exchange the most cordial greetings.

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning. What a morning, too!"

"Going my way?"

"Well, sir, I'm on my way to a hospital that lies out on this road. Let's go on together."

Mr. Burroughs fell in with the suggestion with enthusiasm. He found himself talking with eloquence about the beauty of the morning and the felicity of being out in it. He talked and talked and Walt listened, and now and then Walt made a remark and the two arrived at the hospital of Walt's seeking arm in arm and wonderfully sympathetic. Thereafter Mr. Burroughs and Walt saw each other nearly every day. Upon an early Sunday morning John would stop by for Walt at his little room and the two would walk for miles, conversing on an astonishing variety of subjects until John, looking casually at his watch, would exclaim in alarm. Walt, for whom time possessed a tertiary significance, would halt and gaze in consternation at the sun.

"Not again?"

"Yes, good Lord, we're a half hour late right this minute. Forward at the double!"

Mrs. Burroughs, the breakfast ready and burning to a crisp in the oven these many minutes, would stand posted at the window, in her mind a number of things which this time she should certainly say to them both. At nearly ten the couple would blithely arrive, her husband slightly in the rear endeavouring to convey by frenzied pantomime that such a thing would never happen again. As for Walt, his mood never failed to be one of iniquitous buoyancy. "It was his watch," he would explain with solemn emphasis, "it's slow or something. Sometimes it just stops going, won't go at all." Mrs. Burroughs, inevitably defeated, would gain some consolation in explaining why the food was no longer perfectly cooked, but even this carried no weight, since Walt insisted that he had never tasted such succulent things so flawlessly prepared save in the kitchen of his mother. Burroughs became so fervid a friend and admirer of Walt's that he equalled in devotion the brilliant and debonair O'Connor. O'Connor at thirty was a man of letters deflected from a distinguished career by a piece of outrageous luck. When

Walt had met him in 1860 in the publishing offices of Thayer & Eldridge he had been engaged upon a novel, "Harrington," which his friends and his publishers had confidently predicted would cause a wide and lasting sensation. "Harrington," like the 1860 edition of "Leaves of Grass," had been evilly dealt with by the war. It had proved almost a total failure financially and O'Connor had sought occupation with the Government which, if dull of routine, had offered a regular wage. A clerk in the Lighthouse Bureau, he functioned for the lighthouses with consistent thoroughness and efficiency, but his heart remained in Literature. Once at home with his charming and unusual wife, the lighthouses ceased to absorb his interest. It was probable that he read and had read more than any other man in Washington at that time; indeed, he seemed to absorb the writings of the world as a sponge absorbs water, preserving within his mind, prepared for immediate application or discussion, more books than Walt had ever dreamed of. He had for half a decade constituted himself the champion of Walt and his work, in circles where the accepted comment on these last were hard words or a large contempt. O'Connor, indeed,

walked abroad, his sword half drawn, a gauntlet ready prepared to hurl down before any one upon whose lips he might perceive, at the mention of Walt's name, even the adumbration of a smile. In 1860, when he had offered his hospitality to Walt, he had definitely and permanently become his friend. There was nothing that he possessed that he would not, at an instant's notice, give to him, and Mrs. O'Connor, a woman of a gentler and even wider wisdom, looked upon Walt as a child and cared for him as such. She believed in her heart that some phenomenon of nature had caused this great gray-bearded baby to retain all his life the limpidity of outlook of a healthy little boy. He was precisely as thoughtless and as selfish and as curiously restricted in his prejudices and opinions as an intelligent child to whom every day brings something new to be delighted with. He was, she reflected, capable of the greatest self-sacrifice and the greatest devotion, but these projected from him in sudden jets of emotion not long sustained and were not typical of his character. Her husband was the finer person of the two. Many of Walt's friends in New York had experienced moments of grave doubt about Walt, but on reflection they had come roughly to the

same conclusion. The old boy was a kid. He borrowed money perfectly blandly and at rare intervals paid some of it back, but Heaven knew that if he ever had his pockets comfortably lined he gave and lent his resources and never dunned a debtor. As a matter of fact, money was a subject upon which he had very few ideas. When he had it he spent it or gave it away. When he didn't have it he borrowed it. Apart from its obvious desirable qualities as a commodity, it bored him. He had once borrowed two hundred dollars from a friend, and when he had been unable to repay it he had offered as payment sundry pictures which the friend had maintained were worthless. To Walt, they had been far more interesting than the money. He was bewildered by petty finance, a characteristic that his friends lectured him on at length, only to find that when they had finished he could not remember a word that they had said although he had pleasantly agreed to every statement. To Mrs. O'Connor this was just another instance of his incredible youth. She had detected him wearing socks that were not socks, so entirely filled were they with holes. He might as well have gone barefoot. She had made him promise

to bring all his socks to her for inspection, and one afternoon he had appeared bulging, and standing before her had suddenly swung her into the very middle of an argument the while pulling from every pocket now one sock, now a pair, none matching and all in tatters like battle flags, until they lay about his feet like shot quail, flat and tragic little remnants. She had collapsed in mirth, for Walt's sublime preoccupation with the theme of his remarks had continued until, his hands unconsciously still burrowing, he had found his pockets empty. Both she and her husband were convinced of his genius, but as a man Mrs. O'Connor felt that he should have a nurse.

On July 1, 1865, Walt appeared at the O'Connor home, a picture of grieved astonishment and dismay. Mrs. O'Connor believed for a few minutes that he was going to cry. Her husband was alarmed, fearing that some misfortune had suddenly overtaken Louisa or George or Jeff. He pushed Walt into a chair.

"What on earth's the matter?" His eyes filled with blank despair, Walt pulled a letter from his pocket and mutely tendered it. O'Connor took it and his wife, leaning over his shoulder, the two read

it. It was brief and carried the same truculent effect as an open-handed slap across the mouth:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Washington, D. C., June 30th, 1865.

The services of Walter Whitman, of New York, as a clerk in the Indian Office, will be dispensed with from and after this date.

JAS. HARLAN,
Secretary of the Interior."

"But what the Devil——?"

"But goodness gracious, why?"

Walt, speechless, made paddling motions with his hands. Finally, fixing a dolorous eye on O'Connor, he contrived to speak.

"William, somebody told him I'd written a smutty book, so he went to my desk, took out my copy of 'Leaves', the 1860 one that I've been revising, and now he's fired me, kicked me out. Thinks I'm a menace to public morals most likely."

O'Connor's Celtic soul leapt into a high flame of anger. "It's an outrage, a narrow, bigoted, ignorant, base attack on the liberty of letters." He paced

up and down the room, waving the letter as he spoke. "Pay no attention to it. Get another position and leave this to me. Harlan will be the laughing-stock of the nation and the educated world for this."

Mrs. O'Connor interposed a reasonable comment. "Of course, dear, Mr. Harlan will say that the Department just didn't require Walt's services. He won't be so foolish as to admit that he dismissed him for having written a book of which he didn't approve."

Her husband halted mid-stride. "He's not so clever, Ellen. That may be his second thought, but right now he's too full of righteous indignation against an employee of the Government caught at work upon a volume of obscenity to forego the satisfaction of expressing it. You watch."

Walt groaned. "All one. The main thing is that I've lost a comfortable job that I liked and now I've got to find another. Maybe Harlan will reconsider."

O'Connor snorted. "I doubt that, Walt, sincerely. Let's see what Ashton can do about it."

J. H. Ashton, Assistant Attorney-General, knew and admired O'Connor and liked Walt, though he professed an inability to appreciate completely many

of his poems. O'Connor departed, still detonating, and Walt remained to be consoled and comforted. He ate a plate of cookies and discussed with Mrs. O'Connor a number of ways by which he might continue to earn a livelihood. He suggested lecturing, an idea which had never entirely ceased to attract him, but Mrs. O'Connor deprecated the plan. She had heard Walt declaim and the effect she had considered diverting but not convincing.

The next day brought a note from Ashton regretting that, touching Mr. Harlan, the case seemed hopeless. Harlan had been an able lawyer, a United States Senator and a college president, but in spite of the many opportunities that he had enjoyed to make of himself a man of cultivation and tolerant appreciation, he seemed to have remained a savage bigot in regard to "Leaves of Grass." Like Salmon P. Chase, his earnest conviction seemed to be that the book was largely pornographic and that was the end of it. To Ashton's logical arguments that the fact of Walt's authorship had nothing to do with the discharge of his duties in the Indian Office, Harlan had returned nothing but angry bellowings. He had gone so far as to announce that rather than reinstate

Walt he would himself resign. However, Mr. Ashton would see that Walt was procured different employment and in his opinion the whole matter would best be forgotten. In this Walt heartily agreed. Mr. Harlan's opinion of his book troubled him no more than had Mr. Chase's, or for that matter than those of any of the attackers of his poems that had so far launched their bolts. It was Walt's growing conviction that the reading world was to be divided into two classes, that of those who admired "Leaves of Grass" and that of those who did not. Obviously the members of the second class were not, roughly speaking, worth an awful lot. At any rate, his new position and his desk in the Treasury Building pleased him and it was a far better job anyway. A third-class clerk, to his pleased astonishment he now received sixteen hundred dollars a year and was able to save money without even trying to. He moved into comfortable quarters and continued to pursue his reading and his writing and to complete his slight and simple duties with perfect content. But not so O'Connor. For nine weeks in the latter's fertile mind the subject of Walt's dismissal lay fallow, and then suddenly upon the world burst one of the most

brilliant defences of an author and his work and of the principle of freedom in literature that had ever been written.

"The Good Gray Poet" was a sword of light, a flashing, trenchant arraignment of bigotry and a gorgeous tribute in one, that succeeded in making the Secretary of the Interior exceedingly uncomfortable, Walt and Walt's friends exceedingly happy, and all those who read it exceedingly aware that its author, a clerk in the office of the Lighthouse Bureau, was, beyond all doubt, a man of genius. The publication of "The Good Gray Poet" marked a rallying of the liegemen. Burroughs and O'Connor worked tirelessly to secure favourable reviews of the new edition that appeared in 1866. To the delight of these a spark of enthusiasm had landed in England with Moncure D. Conway, a friend of Emerson's who had come to see Walt in 1855, and there the flames spread with joyful celerity. Such Englishmen of intellect and delicate trained perception as John Addington Symonds and Edward Dowden, Swinburne and William Michael Rossetti, read "Leaves of Grass" and welcomed it as a revelation, as the greatest poetry then being written, as work of tremendous

and virile genius. Mr. Swinburne, in especial, went about like an inspired chrysanthemum, pronouncing praises that caused Carlyle to growl with annoyance and Matthew Arnold to raise his eyebrows and to write O'Connor a letter of dignified advice. Rossetti, a man of more balance than the flame-haired little author of "Atalanta in Calydon," was also more practical. He set out at once to make Walt Whitman a familiar name in England, and others of the growing circle of disciples began to publish reviews and essays with the same object in view. O'Connor and Burroughs and the American following sent up a cheer. The day of Walt's glorification was at hand. And in the meanwhile Walt sat at his desk and beamed, perfectly content, provided for and delightfully free from any but the mildest labours. He listened genially but inattentively to O'Connor's fervid accounts of the rising of the enlightened in England, interrupting him to point out the merits of a wonderful new lamp, an astral lamp, which gave an admirable light and which was all paid for by the office. "That lamp, William, is a new thing in lamps. It's the best lamp that I ever saw and it didn't cost me a cent. Excuse me, William, what

was it you were saying?" O'Connor would continue with fiery enthusiasm to point out that Fame and Appreciation were waiting together to welcome him, come at last to his very doorstep, and Walt would smile and study the astral lamp, and when O'Connor left, say heartily, "Well, William, give my love to Ellen. Tell her I want to see her, talk to her. Thank you for telling me about those fellows in England. It all helps. Say, William, look at the light that lamp gives."

His fame in England did not seem to touch him. He did not comprehend the Oxford mind, and when Symonds, a classical scholar of distinction, wrote to him about "Calamus," a group of poems that celebrated the friendship between men and men, wondering if in Walt's creed of such affection there existed aught Hellenic in its temper and belief, Walt became at first puzzled and then somewhat annoyed. He was not a scholar of Greek literature nor yet Greek customs and the writings of Lucian were to him a totally unknown quantity, but he was no fool. What the private morals of Alcibiades and Socrates might have been he did not know and did not greatly care, but in the saloons of three great cities, on omnibuses

and on ferries he had heard men speak with a coarse levity of certain things that had been, he was aware, treated in other and older languages in polished and lengthy sentences and beautiful paragraphs filled with poetic reasoning. The fact that in Symonds's query there had been nothing save scholarly interest and the desire to understand more fully the mood and the state of mind with which to appreciate these poems, meant nothing to Walt. He considered Symonds a trifle too curious and privately observed that Symonds must entertain an inaccurate opinion of him. But what difference did it all make? It had been kind of him to write in such glowing terms, kind of all of those fellows over there. The spectacle that these events presented to such gentlemen as Mr. Chase and Mr. Harlan was one not devoid of absurdity. To the class of people who did not admire "Leaves of Grass" the sight of the old fake loafing at his desk while on the other side of the Atlantic the keenest and most cultured minds in England showered him with adulation and wrote to him as to a divine teacher and master was ridiculous and undignified. It recalled the mental picture of Bottom, uncouthly shaggy and not even a handsome donkey, being

caressed and fondled by the delicate and beautiful Titania and her fragile handmaidens. When the Britishers woke up and realized what an old fool Walt really was they would realize that the Revolution had been only the first and the mildest of a series of humiliations that they were destined to receive from American hands. That there were plenty of individuals who felt this way Walt was perfectly well aware, but it made not the slightest bit of difference to him. They were in the class of the unenlightened and there they belonged. And it was a satisfaction to know that in Washington he had become something of a celebrity, whose signed photographs were sought almost daily and whose presence upon the streets was always an event of minor importance that aroused the interest of the passers-by and their recognition. When he rode in the horse cars persons of his own age and even young ladies arose and offered him their seats. It was all very pleasant and very encouraging.

It was in a horse car that in 1866 he formed one of the most treasured friendships of his life. Young Peter Doyle, a conductor of one of these, observed on a particularly stormy night that there was but a single occupant of the vehicle in his charge. This

one occupant was a huge old man wrapped in a blanket who sat with his soft hat over his eyes placidly examining his boots and reciting prayers to himself, or they might have been poems. Peter, who was nineteen, was a friendly youth and he was lonely. He had fought in the Confederate army and had been captured, and he now earned two dollars a day in the city where he had been taken a prisoner of war. He knew few people, and of what use was life unless one possessed friends? He stared through the window at Walt, and the car pitched on through the storm. Walt, thoroughly comfortable and warm, thought of his conversations that evening with Burroughs and what a cosy home the Burroughses had. At last Peter, without, could stand the black and angry night no more. The old boy looked like a pleasant old boy. Why not take a chance and go in and talk to him? Walt, within, looked up to find the conductor standing by him.

"It's a cruel night," remarked the conductor tentatively.

"Yes, it is, but in here it's fine," returned Walt.

Peter took heart at once. "With your leave I'll just sit down a bit," he said and did sit down, though

gingerly lest the old gent prove less amiable than he looked. But the old gent proved even nicer than he looked. The horse car rumbled on, the weather howled and tore at the windows, and Walt's stop disappeared unheralded behind them. At the end of the line Walt and Peter Doyle were loath to interrupt their reminiscences of the war, and Walt rode all the way back again. At the other end Peter pointed out with a certain shyness that right near the tracks he knew where they could buy two glasses of whiskey, and wasn't this a night, surely, that merited a bit of whiskey or something to warm the two of them? Peter had swiftly concluded that if there was one man in the world that he wanted for his friend it was this old man, and not so old either, who was the kindest and jolliest old man that he had ever seen. The suggestion that they drink a little whiskey together had been a rash one, for suppose the old man had been teetotal. But afterward Peter reflected with joy that he hadn't been. Walt had welcomed the idea of a drink, and the two had stumbled through the clamant darkness to the bar that Peter had known about. They had had a drink apiece and then another, and by then it was time for Peter to go

back on duty and for Walt to go home. So the horse car had started back again with Walt and Peter talking comfortably in the sheltered interior. At his stop Walt had got out and had promised to come along next day, and Peter had finished his trick feeling like Jay Cooke. From that night on Walt and Peter were inseparable. They went off on Peter's free days and walked all the afternoon and all the early evening, Walt, according to his ancient custom, reciting Shakespeare or pointing out to Peter the various constellations as they appeared in the fading sky. They would wait at Bacon's grocery store on Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, and when the farmers drove in in their long wagons with the high foot-brakes, Walt and Peter would appear about the foremost like a company of savages at the sides of a blackbirder and set about inspecting the produce. Finally they would select a watermelon with the green-and-white dimensions of a large painted pig, pay for it, and sitting upon the steps of the store, divide and eat it while Walt shouted greetings to acquaintances who went by and laughed at them, the gray-bearded poet and the horse-car conductor not yet grown.

"Ah there!" would shout the poet and to Peter's face, as it appeared moist and speechless from the interior of his half of the melon: "See those fellows laugh, Pete. Well, let 'em laugh. They can have the laugh—we have the melon."

When Walt went away to Brooklyn for his vacation he wrote Peter almost daily, telling him of everything that he did and inclosing for his darling baby the kisses that he could not bestow in the flesh.

The class of beings in the world who did not admire "Leaves of Grass" would have made noises about Peter's mail, but fortunately at that time they had no access to it and after all who cared for their denouncing? Certainly not Peter, who was as normal a young man as wore shoe-leather and who had come to consider Walt as much a mother to him as a father or a brother or a dear companion. He welcomed Walt's affection as it came, was it motherly or fatherly or brotherly or that of a close and valued friend. It was all the same to Peter provided that it was affection.

CHAPTER XIX

WALT'S health seemed once again perfect, and Peter, himself a muscular young man, was struck with admiration at his friend's great strength. Peter was young enough to consider physical attainments well worth possessing, and he laughed when he remembered that at first he had considered Walt an old man, a nice old sport, but old and therefore feeble. Walt, he reflected, once aroused, would be the hell of a man in a fight, but he never became aroused. Of course there was never any reason that he should, but just suppose that there should be a reason. Idly, Peter wondered. One day as he was collecting his fares, having left Walt on the rear platform placidly chatting with a fellow employee in the Treasury Department, there came a sudden silence in the car shattered at once by a little explosion of voices on the rear platform. A shrill voice, brittle, edged nastily with hysteria, cried out in a crescendo that rose evilly, "Get out of my way, you bastard."

Peter was on the scene of the debate in two jumps.

A little crowd of excited passengers on the car were, like so many curious gargoyles, observing two men that faced each other upon the ground. Peter gasped. One of them, massive and motionless, pregnant with swift circumstance, was Walt. The other was a typical carpet-bagging politician of the day, lantern-jawed, sallow, a cold blue gash for a mouth and the eyes of an alley cat, jellies that shone palely now like pebbles in a shallow pool. He was trembling, a loaded cane in his right hand half-lifted to strike. The venom in his face was appalling. It seemed to vibrate in a sheet of bile just below the skin. Walt had just remarked in a quiet, almost gentle tone, "Damn you!" when Peter, landing between them, caught the loaded weapon. "Get to hell out of here. This is your stop. Hit the breeze, now, or I'll call a sergeant." He was shouldering the carpet-bagger away from the car, talking desperately and grateful that both the man's hands were in sight. These buzzards so often carried pistols in their waistbands. The man collapsed all at once like a sail from the straining belly of which the wind has suddenly been spilled. "Quit pushing," he said shrilly, in an astonishing whine. He turned and walked

rapidly away at a rickety gait like that of a horse badly spavined. Peter mopped his brow. Walt had calmly resumed his stand on the rear platform and the driver had returned, obviously disappointed, to the front one. The passengers took their seats again and Peter signalled to advance. The old buster! All ready to use up that gullied pole-cat on a moment's notice but waiting for him to hit first. Peter was delighted. Walt's gray-blue eyes had turned almost black. So he must have been angry. Oh, he was, all right. One of his hands had been tightened into a fist the size of a sixteen-pound shot. But, hell, a blow from a loaded cane might have killed him. A while later Peter found himself without passengers save Walt, still enjoying the sunlight and the little winds upon the rear platform. He went back, and looking at Walt with an expression at once quizzical and affectionate, levelled a light blow at his chest.

"Fighting again!"

Walt looked completely bewildered. "How's that?"

"What was the trouble between you and the gent with the loaded stick?"

Walt thought a minute. "Oh. Oh, I see. Oh,

that. Why, he got off the car and he jostled me some while he was doing it, and when I moved a bit so as not to lose all my toes he let out at me. Peter, I got annoyed. Psha! Let's stop at Ben's and have some beer. Ain't it a day, though, Pete? I feel younger than you do." There was thereafter no doubt in Peter's mind about Walt's courage but, rather subtly for his years, he admired his control far more.

For Peter's colleagues and the drivers of the Washington cars Walt possessed the same interested affection that he had had for the Broadway whips. He bought them calf-skin gloves, most comfortable and warm for driving, and when not on the stern with Peter he was forward on the driver's seat engaged in his ancient game of listening to startling narratives, tales of Booth's escape from Ford's Theatre or of the day that Sheridan's men had ridden in, an event which Walt himself had observed. Then Walt would tell a few, and after that the driver would sing a song, beating the time with his whip hand or he would tell a smutty joke, adding gravely, lest Walt seemed inclined to deprecate its content, "A parson told me that one. Yes, sir, he did."

Sometimes when the two friends would be toward

the front of the car, otherwise almost empty, planning some jaunt down the Potomac or a long-thought-of trip to Brooklyn together, a great buccaneer of a voice would roll up behind them and enunciate with sonorous profundity: "Not to create only!" Walt and Peter would turn and Peter would move with respectful speed back to his position on the platform. The possessor of the voice, Senator Garfield, would come down the car bursting with ill-remembered bits of "Leaves of Grass" and hold Walt in jovial talk, suggesting absurd ideas for poems and ridiculous lines for them until the pressure of state forced him to leave the car, still laughing in a broken thunder, perfectly genial and amiably not too witty. Garfield, however, possessed a genuine admiration for some of Walt's poems which prevented Walt from resenting an attitude that might otherwise have seemed not without its tinge of mockery. Walt had a sense of humour directly inherited from his father and the somewhat stolid family of his mother. It was a hearty quality, utterly unsubtle and more physical than otherwise. Concerning his own work or himself, it was as though it did not exist. Himself he took seriously, and that class in the world that con-

tained his admirers also took him seriously. He might have blandly ignored Mr. Garfield, but any man who sincerely admired his work could not be without his worthwhile qualities, and besides, for a Senator, Mr. Garfield was a courteous and kindly gentleman.

While Walt devoted much of his time to Peter and the rest of it to his writing and his work, O'Connor and Burroughs and others of the growing band of disciples proselytized with abandon. The good work in England was going on apace, and Mr. W. M. Rossetti had edited a volume of Walt's poems which was published in London in 1868 shortly after a critical study of William Blake by Mr. Swinburne had included a comparison of that English mystic with Walt.

Rossetti's book reached the hands of the accomplished widow of Alexander Gilchrist, an Englishman of letters who had done distinguished work on the subject of Blake's life and had indeed been occupied upon his biography at the time of his death. Mrs. Gilchrist was a woman of considerable intellectual attainment, a woman of sound resilient fibre who became at once an enlightened admirer of "Leaves of Grass." She was just such a woman as Walt himself

fifteen years before had visualized as the perfect female, strong, courageous, passionate, and her friendship became for him the richest yield of his transatlantic fame.

Mr. Tennyson also entered into a correspondence with Walt, an event which gratified O'Connor profoundly, since, he pointed out, even Mr. Harlan acknowledged Tennyson to be a poet. Such an occurrence marked a significant development in the recognition that increased every day. The liegemen were filled with the exaltation of victory, but Walt remained benignantly composed.

The year 1871 proved a particularly productive one; he issued yet another edition of "Leaves of Grass," a pamphlet of twenty-three poems entitled "Passage to India," and a prose essay, "Democratic Vistas." Edward Dowden in England published in the *Westminster Review* for July "The Poetry of Democracy," and Walt was of course the poet. Ferdinand Freiligrath in the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1868 had sown the seed in Germany, and in 1872 Rudolph Schmidt translated "Leaves of Grass" into Danish and thus Scandinavia became initiated. France, too, that same year welcomed

Walt. Madame Blanc wrote in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* above the signature of Th. Bentzon an article that heralded his genius and his significance.

In June, 1872, he delivered the Commencement Poem at Dartmouth College and his selection for this honour delighted him. He always professed a certain mild contempt for universities and for professors. The academic atmosphere was one for which he had no liking, but chiefly because he suspected that in it his poems sounded but dully, with crude and jagged dissonances and anatomical revelations that were less conducive to smug dismay than to courteous boredom. Therefore when the seniors of Dartmouth, bent upon annoying the faculty, picked Walt as being sure to affront its authority and susceptibilities, and invited him, as in 1838 they had invited Emerson, he was pleased. The academic atmosphere could not be, after all, so bad. Walt made his address and read his poem, but in the back of the church in which the exercises were held, the graduating students either slept fitfully or wondered who the old customer's tailor was. What clothes, good Lord! Walt's voice could not be heard by these young gentlemen, but they were told by those who had been able to hear him that to have

been deaf would have been no great hardship. He spoke without animation and his reading was no better. The seniors of Dartmouth College felt something disappointed when it was all over. But not Walt. He had written before leaving for Hanover a short essay on his own importance and significance as an American, *the* American, poet and had destined it for the editorial columns of the press, but it never appeared. As in the days when he had written his own laudatory reviews for the 1855 edition of his book, he was taking no chances in being overlooked, but he considered his reception and the impression that he had made at Dartmouth flawlessly favourable.

So the year passed triumphantly and the Treasury Department continued to prove for him a philanthropy that he had scarce even dreamed of. Toward December, however, he became concerned to find that the pains in his head that had beset him in the days of the holocaust of '64 were returned to him. When he arose from his desk at night he had for an instant to support himself to steady himself by placing his hand upon the shining surface, nicked here and there by the casual pressure of his boot heels. He remembered that he was not so young as he had been

and what had once required six months to conquer might now require a year. It was a disturbing thought. He would lose his job and his astral lamp, his job that allowed him sixteen hundred dollars a year wherewith to live and work upon his poems, and his astral lamp that gave such miraculous and trustworthy light.

He brushed his hand across his eyes and went to Ellen O'Connor to be cheered. That wise and gentle person thought sadly but privately that Walt was growing old, though with perverse insistence the expression in his eyes remained as infantine as ever.

"You need a rest, Walt, a rest. You've been working too hard."

Walt remained unconsoled. He lingered a little while hoping that her husband might come in. A little while before, he and William had had a violent quarrel concerning a subject that had in reality interested Walt only ephemerally. Sumner, the Senator from Massachusetts, was advocating measures for the reconstruction of the South, and quite trivially Walt and his friend had argued about the wisdom and expediency of such legislation, to find that suddenly their conversation had reached a point when it was

less an argument than a dispute. Words became hard things that hurt the understanding and sharp things that cut the sensibilities. They had ceased at once to speak and had looked at each other with faces grown suddenly alien and cold. O'Connor had turned upon his heel and gone one way and Walt had blundered off another, tears close to the eyes of each. O'Connor had started a hundred times for Walt's boarding house, resolved to put an end to a misunderstanding that was ridiculous and unworthy of both, and Walt had furtively observed O'Connor passing in the street, longing for the smallest sign from his friend upon which he might hurl himself upon him and hug him into perfect reconciliation. But O'Connor's Celtic pride thrust ever a wall across his path, and Walt peeped in vain for a relenting quiver to the handsome mouth that he had known and loved for so long. Ellen O'Connor saw Walt now at only the rarest intervals, and in her heart, while she felt that William's pride was causing him more pain perhaps than it was worth, she knew that Walt must have hurt him bitterly. Considering the loyalty and selflessness with which William had defended and served Walt, she thought that the first definite ges-

ture toward a mending of the breach should be made not by her husband but by his one-time friend. But Walt was stubborn. He had begun to feel that William had renounced him definitely and not for anything would he now have made the first move. Nevertheless, he lingered in the O'Connor parlour, looking at Ellen with worried eyes and absent-mindedly repeating, "It's my head, Ellen, it buzzes and buzzes like there was a bumble-bee in it." Finally he went away, lonely and a little pathetic.

One night in January, 1873, reading by his astral lamp a novel of Bulwer-Lytton's, the bumble-bee in his head returned with horrid violence. The print became blurred before his eyes and he got up, tottered a little, extinguished the light, and went home. As he passed the guard that friendly individual looked at him solicitously.

"Not feeling well to-night, Walt?"

"Oh, not bad, but not good, either. Good-night."

"Good-night, Walt."

He undressed and got into bed. He was very tired. He slept and then seemed to be swimming in Cold Spring Harbor. He swam and floated and dived and his father threw gulls' eggs at him that turned into

California running along in front of the house in Brooklyn, her hair flying and her little legs gleaming like ivory. He was in New Orleans, in a garden filled with bougainvillea, his head in his mistress's lap, her light fragrant fingers in his hair. Mr. Harland appeared from nowhere and turned into a watermelon that he and Peter were eating, and a horse car came right at them. Peter ran and the watermelon turned out to be Pfaff, but Walt couldn't move. The horse car got nearer and nearer. Walt shouted and awoke, the sweat cold upon his face and chest. A dream. He started to turn upon his side. Another dream. He was still asleep. He couldn't move. For an hour he lay with the muscles in his big body, grown now a little soft, taut with agony. Behind his eyes he could feel wires knotting and stretching and interweaving and he wanted Louisa's fingers to take them away. He was paralysed, condemned at fifty-four to crawl about like the boys he had nursed in the war, a cripple, he who had sung of the body's splendour and its beauty.

Peter Doyle, calling early before he went to work, found Walt only partly conscious and summoned a doctor and one or two close friends. Ellen O'Connor

came and Eldridge, and for a while it seemed as if they had arrived only to say farewell. January closed and February brought a rally, and March a feeble attempt to return once more to work, but the will to enjoy living had not yet returned. In April he heard with anguish that Louisa was ill and Ellen O'Connor reasoned with him for an hour that it could not be anything serious or his brother would write him so, while he made desolate little motions with his hands and repeated over and over, "I ought to be with Mother. I know she ain't well. I know she ain't."

A letter from Jeff in St. Louis brought more sorrow. For a terrible moment he feared to open it lest he read that California was dead. It was news that was just as tragic. Martha, her mother, had died, and for her Walt had always possessed a deep affection, such as in a far greater measure he possessed for Louisa. His world seemed to be crumbling upon its foundations and the pillars of his world, the few men and women that he loved, were being shattered and destroyed. In May the conviction that he himself was but alive on sufferance caused him to make his will while Peter, his eyes wet with tears which he collected from

his sun-burnt cheeks with his tongue lest Walt become unduly concerned, looked on and made remarks intended to be cynically humorous but which seemed to himself so gloomy that he checked them and remained abysmally and utterly depressed.

On May 20th Walt bade good-bye to Peter, to Burroughs, and to Ellen O'Connor, and went north to Camden just for a little holiday, as he said, a rest that he needed. On May 23d, sitting in George's house, his silent brother came home to him and confirmed the brutal fears that had kept him sleepless for more than a month, sliding with rough presentiments of torture in the ventricles of his heart. Louisa Van Velsor Whitman had died in the house on Portland Avenue in Brooklyn. Life became, for the first time in his experience of it, intolerably difficult to meet. He felt as if he were alone upon an island from which his mother and those friends that he had loved and that had died had all departed, waving to him as they went, joyous and united. Louisa had always been the one enduring refuge of his life since, as a baby, he had realized that when his hand had been in hers, the lank shadows that had stalked them from behind the orchard tree trunks dared not make a

sally. As a boy, as a young man, and then as a man past fifty he had counted upon her infinite understanding and wisdom and had taken of it all a little greedily, quite as a child might, without fears that Time and the stop-watch of mortality might in an unblessed hour put an end for always to the supply. No other influence in his life had absorbed so much of his devotion and his loyalty, though the contemplation of any great act of self-sacrifice on his part for his mother's comfort and weal he never indulged in. Walt had become primarily an egoist, thorough, consistent, and determined. His mother's death caused him the only great grief, the one deep personal bereavement that he had ever experienced, but it was the deflection of this flow of love from himself, the destruction of this refuge, so that he might never again return to it, that filled him with the sense of unbearable loss.

He continued to stay with George in the house at 322 Stevens Street in Camden, recovering the strength that seemed now reluctant to return to him. For a time the Treasury Department permitted him to retain his position, allowing a substitute to sit at his desk and use the astral lamp, but as Walt gave no signs of returning to Washington both the desk and

the famous lamp were finally definitely assigned to another man. To Walt, Washington had become a city of memories, and his friends had scattered, leaving in their places forlorn echoes of laughter and speech which to remember caused him pain. Peter now worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad, and Burroughs had bought a farm upon the Hudson, and with O'Connor there lived still a dreary enmity. In a brief moment of self-examination Walt perceived that in his treatment of many of the men who had striven in his cause and of William, in especial, he had been less worthy of their devotion than they had thought. They had, almost without exception, fought his battles and taken the blows upon themselves that had so often been aimed at him. They had aided him in his illness and secured him a livelihood, and he had accepted all this from them as he had accepted the love and the support of Louisa, without a thought and without an impulse to repay. But the moment passed swiftly. Sublimely without concern, like a child, he reverted to his life-long creed of self. He did not ask that his friends do these things for him, and if they did them why should he not accept them? As for himself he had obligated himself to do nothing,

and indeed why should he? He reflected with a slight return of cheer that he had saved not a little money in Washington and that it was probable that his friends, knowing him in narrowed circumstances, would contribute more. So even though he had lost his desk and his astral lamp there seemed in his life no danger of actual want. As the days passed he hobbled down to the ferry that plied between Camden and Philadelphia across the Delaware and in the beloved and familiar atmosphere achieved a certain rejuvenescence. In Philadelphia his feet, dragging and uncertain now, would turn of their own accord toward the horse cars of Market Street and he would ride upon the front platforms of the vehicles, explaining to the young and kindly drivers that before they had been born he had driven in just such a way upon Broadway twenty years before the war. He became in Philadelphia, as he had been in New York, in Brooklyn, and in Washington, a familiar figure, though now a figure of old age, become so nobly and with benignant sweetness, a friendly, splendid, beautiful old man although he was only fifty-five. There were those who concluded that for all this magnificence grown mellow, this superb life become now gently cadent, in

reality Walt might be one third fox even if the other two thirds were lion. That he was and had been a loafer, an idler of such distinguished parts that the positions that he had held were almost unnumbered, they knew, and a few had described his usage of the devoted liegemen as outrageous; an assumption, ineffable in its egotism,that what these had done for him was after all only his due. They had observed and snorted and had spoken heatedly of the faker in Camden, and they had not wished him well, but these were persons the like of which had always attacked him, Walt remembered, people of the type to which so many years before Mrs. Brenton in Jamaica had belonged. There were times when, lonely and ill, the realization of the numbers of his enemies depressed him, but as his strength returned these grew less and less frequent. He began again to make poems, and with a confidence utterly unshaken, to turn again for consolation and healing to the out of doors upon which in crises he had all his life depended.

CHAPTER XX

TEN miles from Camden, through murmurous tongues of woodland and meadowland rich and yielding and steaming in the sun of late spring and summer, runs Timber Creek, brown and in places secretly profound. Saplings run down and line its banks in places, and in places it pursues its conversational stroll unfringed by trees and unattended save by turtles and the trout that hang with their heads upstream and their tremulous tails directly down, silent and unemotional. Here in the days of his convalescence came Walt, dragging himself with uncomfortable stress and sweat, and sat down upon the warm lip of bank above the water. The sun sank into his flesh and lapped his ageing bones about like gossamer spun durably and warmed. Wonderfully, the stiffness in his joints seemed to tremble and retreat a little, smothering twinges as it went. Watching the velvet coil of a tiny current sweep suddenly beneath his feet, Walt beheld the manner and the method of his cure. Life in his brother's house was comfortable enough, but

George had grown more reticent with age, and four years of war had so blocked his deep but pacific emotions that now the channels through which they ran lay farther than ever from the surface of his expression. In a kindly manner he fed and sheltered Walt and looked upon his poems as things to him largely incomprehensible but yet not without their virtue, since they had in some quarters made friends for his brother. But he could not swing his mind from the important concerns of the Metropolitan Board of Water Works of New York City down to a discussion of the nascent spring or the marvellous bigotry that walked guised in the scholar's gown and mortarboard. Colonel Whitman loved Walt, but there was an affectionate contempt for him somewhere peeping in this love. A man of singular probity of character George had grown up to be, unselfrighteous and filled with humility beneath his iron exterior and taut habit of command, a man who had all his life made sacrifices for the people that he loved to the rigorous exclusion of self. Long ago he had realized angrily that Walt seldom made sacrifices and admitted with a certain large simplicity that what suited him was what counted with him. But though he still realized

this, George no longer became angry when he thought of it. It was Walt's life to live, and George had achieved that admirable tolerance of mind that forbore to meddle or to quarrel with the failings of others. For after all who could say that these were failings?

Walt found life with his brother George unsuited to his tastes. Somehow he felt that it militated against his individual existence and made of him a part and not the whole of a scheme of life. He wished for an existence of his own unconnected with the pattern of another's day and of which only he should be the captain and the leader. Constantly he thought of securing somewhere a little house of his own, and it irked him now and then that the money that he had saved in Washington was being slowly dissipated before it could be used for such a venture. In Timber Creek he perceived an anodyne which he felt could not fail to cure him and, might he live there, his desire for a separate unity of self would be satisfied. But he hesitated to exhaust his principal upon the buying or the building of land or habitation.

Fortune, absent for more than two years from the conduct of his affairs, now, however, returned to him. Robert Buchanan, the somewhat uneven-tempered

English poet, who had already grossly insulted Dante Gabriel Rossetti and infuriated the palpitating Swinburne, now took upon himself to administer to America a sound correctional for its treatment of its greatest poet and prophet. Walt Whitman, so wrote Mr. Buchanan in the London *News* in 1876, was being ignored and allowed to live in shameful circumstances of penury while the nation of which he was the greatest genius waxed fat in evil opulence and crass stupidity.

This letter so astonished William Michael Rossetti, the chief of Walt's liegemen in England, that he wrote Walt at once for confirmation, which he was even more astonished to receive. But Walt, though he looked with joy upon this diversion in his favour, felt that Mr. Buchanan took rather too much upon himself when he assumed that America was a country of blind scrabblers after prosperity to the denial of its men of genius, and in his reply to Mr. Rossetti he denied that actually he lacked for the necessities of life. His pride in his nationality at first dictated the wrathful comment that what the hell did this man Buchanan know about it, anyway, but the thought of financial support and the freedom and peace of Tim-

ber Creek bade him walk softly before he rejected any proffers of assistance. Wherefore he wrote with dignity to Mr. Rossetti and admitted that he was "poor now, almost to penury," but that the only method by which he chose to secure money was by the sale of his books, the sixth edition of "Leaves of Grass" and "Two Rivulets," new poems and prose, which sold for ten dollars the set. The result was stupendous. Englishmen of distinction and fame paid twice and three times this price when Rossetti made known the news of Walt's circumstances. Tennyson and Ruskin, and Dante Rossetti, Lord Houghton and Edmund Gosse, as well as the liegemen, Edward Dowden and Edward Carpenter and many others, subscribed with a dazzling generosity. The forces behind Mr. Chase and Mr. Harlan shook, Walt imagined, with furious chagrin. His own countrymen, in the meantime, became somewhat annoyed, and it was pointed out that in his reception and recognition by American periodicals and men of letters his opportunities had in no way differed from those that had possessed Mr. Bryant and Mr. Longfellow. The suggestion that there existed a conspiracy against Mr. Whitman was absurd, and "were he or his friends," wrote Mr. G.

W. Curtis in *Harper's Monthly* for June, 1876, "to authorize an appeal like that made by Mr. Buchanan, there would be a response, we are very sure, which would dispose of that gentleman's assertions and innuendoes." A little storm blew up and clamoured for a while and died, but it left certain people with the feeling that once again England had been to a certain extent taken in, and during the process the United States had sustained a slight but unmerited injury in the eyes of reading Europe.

But for Walt the effect of Mr. Buchanan's loud crying in the English press was beyond words wonderful. He did not buy or build on Timber Creek but to the Staffords, friendly folk whose farm lay near to it, he went almost at once and with them made his residence. George sighed, but of what use to argue with Walt? George had mildly resented Mr. Buchanan's implications that his house and board were poor things, poor-house-like, in fact, and incapable of maintaining Walt save in the ragged habit of destitution. He had privately awaited Walt's denial of this with ringing and indignant words. It had not come, and Walt had departed to Timber Creek, but George was stubbornly determined that no one was to have the opportunity

of accusing him of refusing Walt aid. And besides all this he loved Walt, and Walt he knew possessed for him affection and loyalty though his ways were those that George had never understood.

So Walt departed and George continued to offer him his house and indeed to build him a cottage on his land, both of which suggestions were refused, without any expressions, however, save those of benignant sweetness. On Timber Creek Walt became once more perfectly happy. All day long he spent in the hot meadows or in the busy woodlands where the birds spoke constantly and the squirrels, as is their custom, throve on loud misunderstandings among themselves. He became passionately interested once again in the functionings and schedules of nature, observing with his gray-blue eyes, grown once again superbly keen, the portentous preparations for nest-building and the dishonest procedures involved in the storing of nuts for the winter. He learned the names of great numbers of wildflowers and of birds by whose swift passings above and about him he recognized the species. Filled with a deep peace touching all things, the memories of his life, his sorrows and his joys—and these seemed by far the more numerous—returned

now to lend him serenity and an abiding sense of earned repose. Slowly he became aware that about him was growing up a wall of protective adoration and admiration. A wall against the rugged sides of which the waves of mockery and persecution broke and retreated, shattered. He was becoming a cult, and subtly he realized that in his mode of life, his poverty, and his ageing body he encouraged, strengthened, and inspired it. An old and experienced hand at self-advertisement, in moments when the genuine virtue of his meditations and composition lived no longer within him, a tiny voice bade him capitalize the habits which for years many had made mock of but which now were gaining him the reputation of a seer and a prophet. As he lay upon his back and considered the silent whisperings of the great systems in the midnight sky a sudden intuition of the actual quality of his significance as a poet would steal in upon his consciousness. He, Walt, was nothing save a mass of insulated clay of effective and not unbeautiful modelling. But he was clay, and besides that a creature of no great nobility. He lacked the selflessness of George, the devoted loyalty and brilliant qualities of mind of William O'Connor. He had been,

and was, selfish, secretive, and in a manner sharp to turn things to his own advantage. He was conscious that he had been at times supremely ungrateful, and one might say, perhaps not without some justice, that his attitude toward other poets and men of letters who had lived and striven and achieved fame was arrogant and unperceptive. He had written, for instance, that Samuel Johnson was a sour, malicious, egotistical man. "He was," Walt had gone on to say, "a sycophant of power and rank, withal; . . . His head was educated to the point plus, but for his heart, might still more unquestionably stand the sign minus. Nor were the freaks of this man the mere 'eccentricities of genius': they were probably the fault of a vile low nature. His soul was a bad one." Surely this had been somewhat bigoted even though the days of his editorship of the Brooklyn *Eagle* were now far distant and had been in any case youthful ones. But he thought Shakespeare remote and feudal and he could stand but little of Dante or of Milton. Of men of his own day, he slept heavily over Browning and read Matthew Arnold with contempt. Victor Hugo was an insular author and something tedious. Homer, ah, Homer was good, but how few were the

Homers of modern times. No, the fact remained that besides his own poems there were but few that merited the eternal sign-manual of immortality. This, Walt pondered, was his sincere conviction, but in the slender shaft of light that nocturnal intuition cast upon his mind he discovered his character and his opinions to be no better than another's and no more admirable than they should be. But what he was himself, he perceived, had nothing to do with his poems. His poems and the essence of which they had been created had been deposited within him, and as the vessel of their containing he remained vicariously sublime. But when the vessel had been emptied, its virtue might be no more than that of any clay, unperdurable and flawed. Staring the constellations out of countenance, he heard the beat of heavy wings and an owl swept upon its dark mission to provide. The light and clarity of his self-examination passed and the ancient confidence returned. He was growing old, he felt, and mortality had already knocked upon the doorway of his days, but of death he had no fear. He was immortal and his substance was retained compactly between the covers of a book. Unlike a poet for whose work Walt possessed a

slender affection, he had no fears that he would cease to be.

The days upon Timber Creek merged into months and these into years. Walt throve in the sunlit air and grew strong again and in the meantime the cult of his person and his poems grew amazingly. In 1876 Mrs. Gilchrist came to Philadelphia, and the refuge that had passed with the death of Louisa returned with the coming of this capacious heart and sound, perceptive brain. Dr. R. M. Bucke of Ontario, a Canadian physician, himself a mystic and a man whose faith in mankind was a stout and living inspiration, came to see Walt and became at once almost the chief of all the liegemen. With him Walt went to Canada and saw again the expanse and green continuity of plains and mountains. He had in September, 1879, made a trip into the West, and in him had revived that excitement in the fertile immensity of his country that had so stirred him when with Jeff he had, in the pleasant forenoon of his life, travelled down the Mississippi to New Orleans. He saw the Rockies and in a characteristic burst of enthusiastic speech had recognized in them the law of his own poems, though the Rockies had remained imperturbable and silent.

In April, 1881, he went to Boston to read a lecture that he had written upon Lincoln and he was received by Mr. Longfellow, who bespoke him with cordiality and respect. Walt was touched, but the influence upon his life of his own cult prevented him from being unduly impressed or flattered. In the ageing afternoon of his life his own shadow had come to stretch the longest and the broadest.

A little later, accompanied by Doctor Bucke, he returned to Huntington and to Cold Spring upon Long Island for a longed-for inspection of the countryside of his youth. The fields and the woods and the quiet traffic of the roads were the same. There were more farmhouses now, and much that had been fallow land was now tilled and was bringing forth its yield. Walt did not long remain. There were many memories and they were all grateful to him, but the shrine in Camden must not be left too long uninvested by its deity, and more and more he preferred to be where the disciples in their numbers first had found him.

In New York one day he stopped at Pfaff's, whose new restaurant stood now in Twenty-fourth Street. The German was grizzled but rubicund and satis-

factorily round. When Walt entered he rubbed his eyes for an instant, and then, with a short guttural expression of joy, propelled himself upon him. The two men, one gray and sturdy, the other white and massive but without flexibility or active strength, embraced each other with little explosions of affection. Pfaff seated Walt at one of the little round tables and disappeared cellar-wards with eloquent gestures. It was champagne he sought, and when it arrived he picked up the shapely bottle and cuddled it for a minute in his hands. A notable vintage, suitable for the reunion of old friends. They talked for an hour or so of the old circle, Clapp and Swinton, O'Brien and the rest, gone now, most of them, as Pfaff remarked, over to the majority. The good wine unlocked memories, and in the quiet room, almost empty for it was early in the forenoon, the thick guttural and the clearer, more placid voice merged and emerged in antiphonal cadences while the glasses clinked in fragile staccatos upon the table top. Pfaff's "*aufwiedersehen*" was, Walt felt, the courteous denial of a farewell inevitably to be for ever. He left the old landlord of the days of his pulsing prime waving to him from the doorway, a napkin in his

hand which shortly afterward Pfaff blew his nose into, violently, while a solitary but considerable tear appeared and vanished in his eye.

Walt went again to Boston in August, 1881, to see the definitive edition of "Leaves of Grass" through the press. James R. Osgood & Company, through John Boyle O'Reilly, had made Walt an offer for the book, and for the first time since the appearance of the 1860 edition his work was to be issued beneath a publisher's imprint. This time he stayed away from Camden for three months, pursuing in Boston the echo of that life that he had once so magnificently loafed away in Brooklyn and New York. He walked upon the Common and at City Point he watched the harbour tides swing in beneath the superintendence of the gulls. F. B. Sanborn of Concord, the friend of Emerson now in his last and beautiful decline, invited him to Concord and Walt entrained at the North Station and watched the fields and the thick green woods between Somerville and Belmont and Waltham, Stony Brook, and Lincoln slide by until the blue sheet of Walden curved into view and Mr. Sanborn's "Here we are!" disturbed the pleased concentration of his gaze. That

evening Emerson came, and Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa and others of the fellowship of the Concord intellectuals, and Walt spent an hour or two contentedly observing the man that almost thirty years before he had addressed as Master. Next day there was a dinner at Emerson's house, and it was a momentary shock to Walt when, on greeting Emerson after the lapse of twenty-four hours, the wonderful old man, peering at him keenly, had given not a sign of recognition. It had been a terrible thirty seconds, but his son had whispered to the Sage and the smile and the handclasp, though both of them a little tremulous, that had been thereupon immediately proffered had consoled Walt almost at once.

He returned to Camden in November, and during the winter the Osgood edition of the "Leaves" sold moderately well. In March, however, District Attorney Stevens of Boston, upon complaint of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, suggested that "Leaves of Grass" be suppressed. Postmaster Tobey of Boston excluded it from the mails. Osgood & Company, failing to persuade Walt to excise a list of passages, furnished by Mr. Stevens and offensive to those interested in the suppression of vice, returned

the plates to Walt, who perfectly calmly turned them over to Rees, Welsh & Company of Philadelphia, later to become the publishing house of David McKay. The class of the unenlightened, Walt observed, still numbered its recruits.

In March, 1884, the project that had long fascinated him, a house of his own, was finally achieved. For $1,750 he purchased a small two-story house in Mickle Street, Camden, Number 328. To this venture Walt contributed about $1,300, and a friend, George W. Childs, furnished the balance. When he moved in, Walt was as excited as a child, though the attendant liegemen could find but little in Mickle Street that seemed favourable to pleasant residence. For one thing when the wind sat in the right quarter an overpowering odour of guano marched straight upon it, dismaying even the sparrows and causing the inhabitants to ponder gloomily on the wisdom of manufactured fertilizers. Then, too, the street was not beautiful or even passably attractive to the sight. It was a depressing street filled with mean houses and predatory cats and dust whorls in the summer months that spun and stung the eyes and left upon the clothes unlovely deposits difficult to remove.

But to Walt it was a pleasant anchorage, quiet and secure. As a matter of fact, it was not quiet, since at a not distant railway crossing reigned an almost constant pandemonium of strident sounds, clanging of bells and the pounding of wheels upon unevenly joined rails, sounds all of which travelled clamorously down Mickle Street, arousing even heavy sleepers and no less heavy curses. But they failed to trouble Walt. He slept, he found, serenely through it all, and a lilac bush, though dusty and discouraged, that lived unhappily in the yard, compensated him for the odour and the tumult alike. Mrs. Mary Davis, a woman of a certain age and mildly sentimental nature, was enlisted as a housekeeper and the ménage was complete. There were added at various times a parrot that spoke shortly and without range of thought or vocabulary, a black cat that at odd times and without warning would run madly down the street and then up it again in frantic zigzags, to return quietly to the kitchen with no excuses to offer for her behaviour, and a dog with spots but no real distinction of appearance. Mrs. Davis cared for all of these and for Walt, upon whose shirts she performed many little labours of love, consisting chiefly

in sewing upon them lace collars that could make no real impression on Walt's guests since his beard completely obscured them, and lace cuffs, happily less in ambush. Of sweeping and of dusting below and above stairs she was admirably fond, but since Walt did not mind the dust and passionately objected to the disturbing of his books and papers, her activities above were subject to severe restrictions. Thus the shrine of the cult—though uninitiated visitors fled from it coughing with handkerchiefs held to nose and mouth when an unchancy breeze slanted across the roofs of Mickle Street—possessed for the disciples the authenticity of the spell and influence. To it came great men and distinguished ladies and the solemn intent individuals who were devoting the maturity of their lives to the care and cherishing of their great enthusiasm. Among these were Horace Traubel and Thomas Harned, his brother-in-law, men of intelligence who constituted themselves the chief pillars of Walt's cadent years. Not a day passed but that some notable pilgrim would appear, talk for an hour or so, and go away, firm in the conviction that whatever the old man's poems might be, he himself was worth a long journey to see and speak

with. The clay of which the vessel was made was becoming wonderfully refined, lit from within by the flaming dregs of that which in 1855 had poured from its containing shell.

As the years followed one another in Mickle Street Walt became increasingly aware that the class of people in the world who did not admire "Leaves of Grass" was becoming less and less audible in its opposition. Support and affection lapped him round, and when he became too physically feeble to walk the streets that he loved, a horse and buggy were bought for him by the subscriptions of such men as Mark Twain and Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Richard Watson Gilder and Edwin Booth. The forces of which Mr. Harlan had once been the fulminating leader remained large but silent. Many people who insisted that his poems were unreadable preserved for Walt himself a stout affection. They were confident that this old giant with his snowy hair and beard and clear pink skin could never have aged so nobly had he practised the philosophy the benefits of which he advocated and the laws he lustily proclaimed in the poems to which they most objected.

After all, the old boy, now gazing benignly upon

the world from those blue-gray eyes, as childlike as ever, though less lustrous, had shouted the naked virtues of sex, had described and catalogued the bodies of man and woman to no great purpose. No man in his senses could look at him and perceive beneath that comfortable serenity the dark remnants of an impulse toward the cantharides and adulterated rum which, so had screamed Mr. Swinburne in apostasy, his Venus had partaken of. It was true that he had written to John Addington Symonds that he had had six children though he had never married; but none, not even the closest of the liegemen, had ever seen or definitely heard of these casually engendered offspring. He had, he wrote, a living grandchild, a Southern boy, but Mr. Traubel, whose attendance upon him day by day for more than half a decade rivalled the dogged faithfulness of Boswell, could secure from him no concrete allusion to the women that he had loved and rendered fruitful. Indeed, there were those who privately believed that the children that he had begotten were mythical infants, created in the evening of his life to increase his own satisfaction in the grateful memories of his robust and powerful prime. With extraordinary

secretiveness he imparted to no one the stories of his loves. But he found the floundering suppositions of the liegemen touching these, not without their subtle flattery. It was almost twenty years now since he had last experienced the old urgent tremor of sexual desire. In 1870 he had inscribed, with many emphatic underlinings, in a notebook the following fervent injunction to himself:

> *It is* IMPERATIVE, that I obviate & remove myself (& my orbit) *at all hazards* [away from] from this
>
> 
>
> *incessant enormous* & [enormous] PERTURBATION.
>
> 

Vigorously if crudely drawn fists had called attention to this upon the page, and a little beyond there had followed an added exhortation:

> TO GIVE UP ABSOLUTELY & *for good, from this present hour,* [all] this FEVERISH, FLUCTUATING, *useless undignified pursuit of 164—too long,* (*much too long*) persevered in,—so humiliating—*It must come at last* & had better come now—(*It cannot possibly be a success*)
> LET THERE FROM THIS HOUR BE NO FALTERING, [or] NO GETTING——

Here a word was erased.

> *at all henceforth,* (NOT ONCE, *under any circumstances*)—*avoid seeing her, or meeting her, or any talk or explanations*—*or* ANY MEETING WHATEVER, FROM *THIS HOUR FORTH, FOR LIFE.*



Beneath this he had noted: "Outline of a superb calm character." Number 164 had, in the afternoon of his days, possessed less appreciation of the majesty of masculinity than it had been in his experience to receive, and it had been no part of Walt's intentions to allow the lustres of past conquests to be dimmed.

Long ago in New Orleans, a woman of beauty and attainment had married a Creole gentleman of position and had borne him five children, the eldest a boy, born a seven-months baby. Tenderly, the thought of the alien blood, the Dutch strain and the Revolutionary American, in that boy grown to a man and dead with a single issue, warmed Walt as had in the glory of his twenties the arms of his best-loved mistress. The departed splendour of virility merited such unspoken reminiscence, but there should be, in Walt's opinion, no senescent avowals.

CHAPTER XXI

AS THE decade of the 'eighties closed the seasoned soundness of his frame began once again to yield to the racking stress of the old evil, abetted now by the cumulative weight of his years. He was seventy-one and the powers of resistance that had enabled him at forty-seven and at fifty-three to throw off the attack of malady had been largely dissipated by the departure of the stalwart solidity of maturity from his tissues and his muscles. He was old. Death sat all day and studied him, compassionately and patiently. Walt had but few periods of revolt and never one of fear. The religion of the churches sickened him, but of his own immortality he was as confident as he was of the greatness of his poems. And besides, he had bought himself a tomb, a durable and imposing vault and monument in Harleigh Cemetery. He had thought of this tomb for years, putting money by for it, and while even the closest of his liegemen believed him almost without resources, he had saved enough to put his cherished plan into

effect. It was a handsome tomb of ponderous, rough-hewn stone. Two massive uprights, a cross-section and above that a solid triangular mass, seemed built into a bank thick with trees and diligently murmurous with the sound of leaves. It was a tomb that guaranteed security and a sound, untroubled sleep; a rugged tomb somehow suggestive to him of the temper of his poems.

Walt would sit in his little room, surrounded by thirty years and more of correspondence and accumulation of journals, manuscripts, and books, poking idly with his stick to produce from the mass an item of interest for the earnest and devoted Mr. Traubel, and meditate pleasantly upon his tomb and the restful melody of little winds in the trees above it, discountenancing the nearing scrutiny of Death like a little boy who with resignation and an utterly fearless calm awaits his nurse to come to take him home from a delightful party. Sometimes the canary, added in a soft moment to the household, would burst liquidly into song, and the days more than half a century behind him would march with their attendant memories across his eyelids, the swimming in the Great South Bay, the walks upon the sounding

beaches of Montauk, the cosy hearth in West Hills, Louisa, Louisa, Louisa.

What a pleasant life it had been, what a pleasant life!

What friends he had made!—O'Connor—dead now but, thank God, not before a reconciliation had taken place—O'Connor and his wife, Burroughs and Bucke, Harned and Traubel. Dear Horace, dear boy, who had made these last years so comfortable and secure and who was to care for him and his memory and his fame even after he had left Mickle Street for his splendid tomb. And then there had been Peter, his dear baby, young, alert, loving. . . .

And the women that he had loved! They were dead now, all of them, but he remembered their beauty, their superb surrender, their infinite and sensuous understanding. . . .

New York and the crowds upon Broadway, Balky Bill, Old Elephant and the rest, and a face that he knew, the face of a woman who had loved him, smiling, hesitant, wonderfully unchaste. . . .

Ah, well.

New Orleans had been so beautiful, but his love had flung beauty upon it, a cloak of beauty, as if to hide its eyes that she and Walt might love in privacy

in every street, in every garden, nakedly and unashamed of shame. How splendid a thing was the body of a man, the body of a woman. And yet, good God, how perishable; structured with bones that became brittle, thewed with thews that became dead things and unresilient, and with organs that grew atrophied and weak of functioning.

His lungs, now, they felt as if some solid substance had been poured into them, causing him to breathe with agony. . . .

He heard bells ringing and tried to call to young Warry Fritzinger to close the windows. Church bells, the religion of churches, a stale and lifeless thing. An evil thing, really.

Young Warry Fritzinger, a good boy, the son of Mrs. Davis, a good woman. A better nurse than Baker. Officious, Baker had been. A troublesome man, always with medicines that he did not know the reason for.

The religion of churches. Stale and lifeless. His friend Bob Ingersoll could throw the whole business out of court by merely opening his mouth.

The pain in his lungs was growing worse. He wondered if William O'Connor had died pleasantly, as he had deserved to die. A brilliant man, William,

brilliant and generous and devoted. But what was death? Nothing to be afraid of, an easy, a grateful thing to meet. Emerson was dead, and Longfellow and Carlyle, Louisa and Mrs. Gilchrist and Abraham Lincoln. There was his tomb in Harleigh Cemetery. Harleigh, an ugly name. But the tomb, the tomb was first-rate. The contractors had said that it would cost a few hundreds to build, but it had cost $4,000, so they claimed, and Tom Harned had gone over and made them cut down the bill. Staunch, Tom was, staunch and devoted. There was a young fellow down from New York, a newspaper man most likely, waiting around to pick up some last words. Always around, upstairs and downstairs, a nuisance. There he was now, bellowing about something in the hall. Talking about some flowers that hadn't come from New York, was he? Oh, he be God damned!

March 26, 1892. He was seventy-three.

He was fishing for eels through the ice in Cold Spring Harbor. Of course you might not get any, but sometimes you might strike a regular bonanza of eels, big ones with fine meat, white, that Grandpa Van Velsor doted on.

It was drizzling outside. But there was spring in

the air, though in Mickle Street Spring walked softly and late, ready to flee before the dusty onrush of summer. Still, in spite of the rain, there was a smell of spring about. Flowers, blooming early, the lilacs that had grown in Brooklyn and thrust their clusters out over garden fences and nuzzled the faces of the passers-by. Somewhere in the house there were flowers. That was strange. Flowers. The flowers that young fellow had been talking about. Flowers for him, for he was dying. He was dying, but just the same he was immortal and Death was all right, too, pleasant enough and restful. Above his head there was a bell-rope, put in when he couldn't thump on the floor any more with his heavy cane to attract Warry's attention or his mother's. When Death stood at his pillow he wouldn't be able to pull that rope.

"Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death."

Beautiful words. Familiar words.

Warry Fritzinger and Mrs. Davis saw him reach

suddenly above his head, groping for the bell-rope. His arms fell.

When the liegemen stood about him and looked upon his face they saw that Death had indeed come to him lovely and soothing.

THE END

ANDERSON, INDIANA



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